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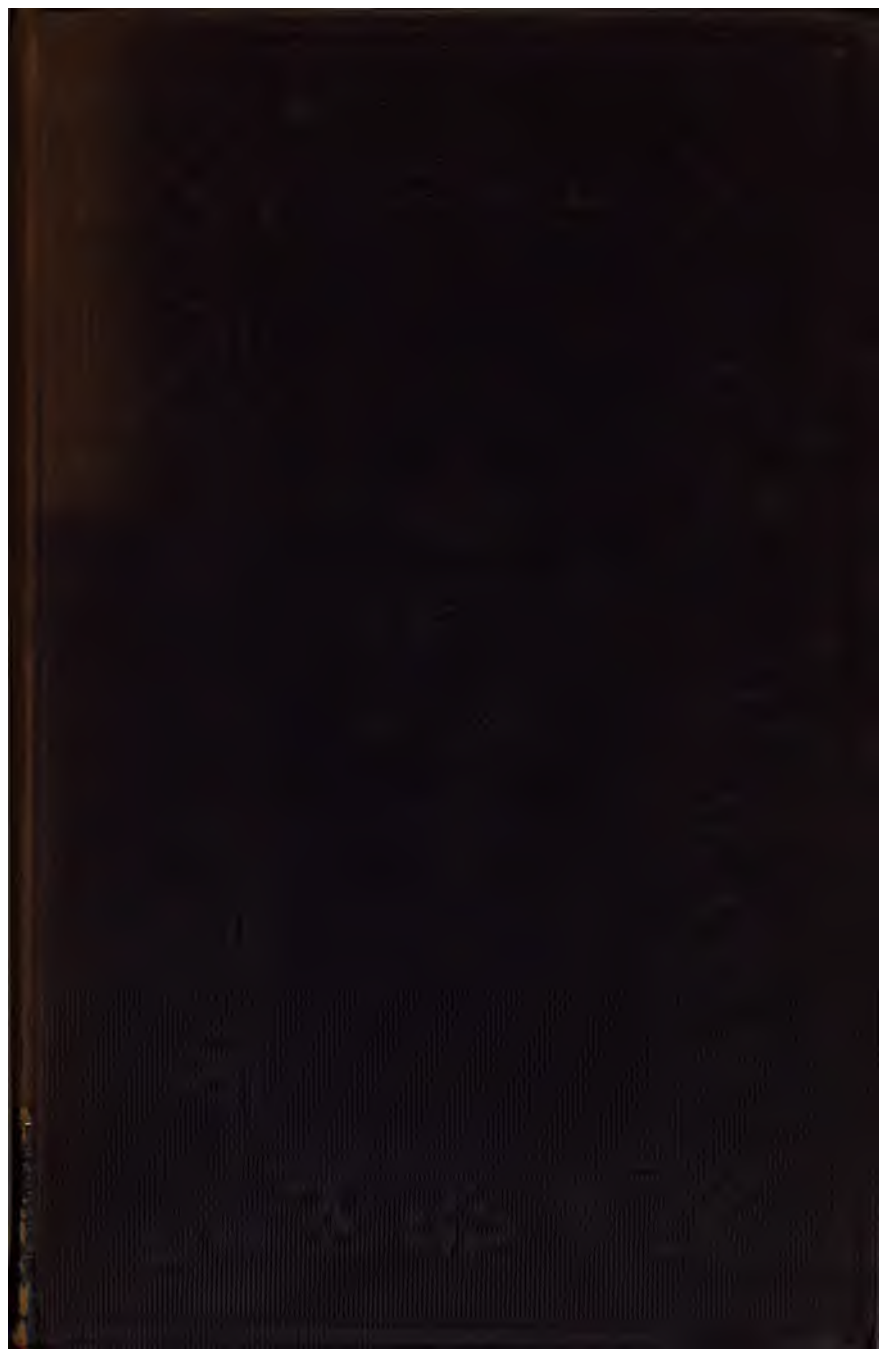
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A MANUAL
FOR
GODFATHERS AND GODMOTHERS,
WHO HAVE STOOD
At the Baptism of Infants:
WITH
ANSWERS TO THE OBJECTIONS COMMONLY MADE
AGAINST THE USE OF SPONSORS.

BY
GEORGE HILL, M.A.
CURATE OF TOR-MOHUN, TORQUAY.

"Take this child away, and nurse it for me."—EXODUS ii. 9.

LONDON:
FRANCIS & JOHN RIVINGTON,
ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD, AND WATERLOO PLACE.
1853.

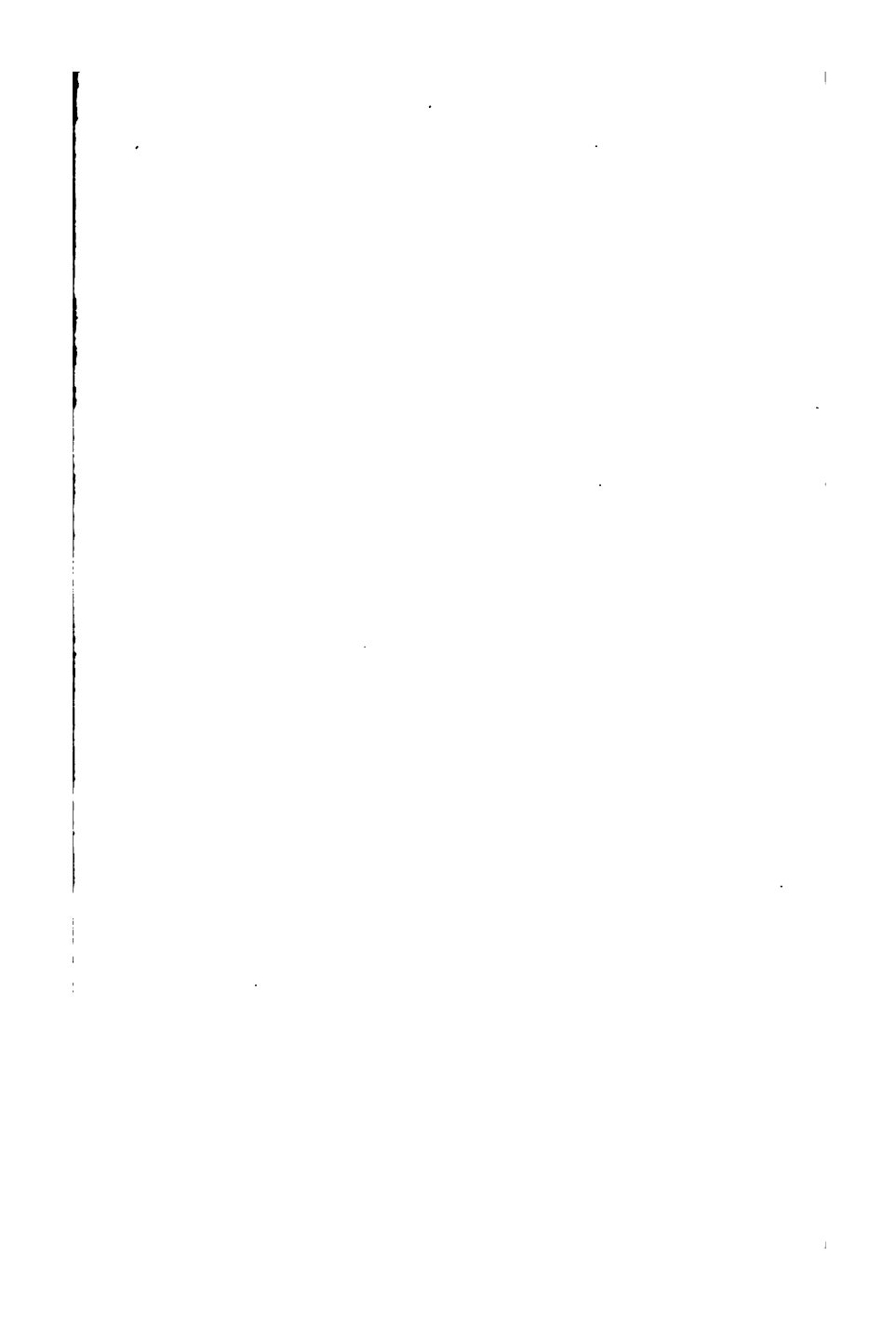
138. d. 271

LONDON:
GILBERT & RIVINGTON, PRINTERS,
ST. JOHN'S SQUARE.



TO THOSE WHO,
IN CHARITY AND PIETY,
KINDLY CONSENTED,
AS GODFATHERS AND GODMOTHERS,
TO PRESENT MY OWN LITTLE ONES
AT THE SACRED FONT,
This Manual
IS THANKFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY
INSCRIBED.

G. H.



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A

MANUAL,

&c.

CHAPTER I.

THE ORIGIN, ANTIQUITY, AND GENERAL DESIGN OF THE INSTITUTION OF SPONSORS AT INFANT BAPTISM.

1. WHEN the Sacrament of Holy Baptism is administered, whether it be to an infant, or to an adult—whether privately performed, or publicly in the congregation, it is required by the Church, as an useful precaution, that ordinarily, beside the minister, two or more other persons should be present.

They are present, however, not always in precisely the same capacity, or for the same purpose.

In the case of any private Baptism, their office is a simple one: they then serve merely as witnesses, both for the sake of giving a

greater solemnity to the service itself, and in order that, at any future time, there might be those who could testify to the fact.

In the case of the public Baptism of an adult, their office is more extended, for then they likewise engage, for the time to come, to remind the baptized person of the high blessings of his Christian calling, and of the duties and obligations which it lays upon him. They stand, therefore, in this case, not merely as witnesses of the fact, but as his elders in Christ, pledging themselves, in God's behalf, to be to him his faithful remembrancers and monitors. And so they are called by the name of godfathers and godmothers.

But in the case of the public Baptism of an infant (or of an imbecile person), their office and duty become more extended still. Here they are present not as witnesses or as special monitors only. They have a yet further function to fulfil, in consideration of the personal helplessness and insufficiency of the feeble one whom they bring to Baptism. They have, as its spiritual guardians, to "undertake for it," answering in its name all the interrogatories which are asked at Baptism, and becoming also securities or bondsmen unto the whole Church, that as its capacities shall gradually enlarge, it shall be brought up to lead a Christian life. And hence they are specially known by the names of its sureties and its sponsors, as well

as by the more general name of godfather or godmother.

2. Again, when any who have been baptized privately, on account of sickness, at home, are afterwards (as it is requisite, if they live) brought to church, there to be publicly recognized and received as members of Christ's flock before the congregation, a very similar provision is required to be made. For, on these occasions also, special persons must be present, whose office and duties correspond to those above described in the cases of public Baptism, and who bear the same names of godfathers and sponsors. For example, if it be an infant who is so brought (and the case of infants is especially contemplated by the Church), they witness to this public certification of its Baptism, and so, henceforth, may fairly authenticate the fact of the Baptism itself; they answer in its name, and they give the requisite security for its Christian training. They are its godfathers, as much as if they had stood at its public Baptism. And so it is ruled in the Church, that (except whilst early death is imminent) no child baptized shall be without its proper sponsors.

It is of these godparents, or sureties, or sponsors *for children*, their office, and its duties, that I propose to treat. I include alike those who have stood for a child at the public Baptism itself, and those also who have stood for

one already baptized, at its subsequent public reception ; and while my observations refer primarily to the former, they will, for the most part, apply equally to the latter. The many misapprehensions which prevail in connexion with this subject, and the too small estimation in which the office is very frequently held, afford sufficient reason for my treating of it at some length, and asking my reader to give me his patient and serious attention.

In the present chapter, I propose to speak of the office of godfather or godmother for children, not specially, as it is used in our own particular Church, but generally, as an institution of the Church at large. I will consider these three points :—1st, whence it appears to have been derived ;—2dly, what evidence there is of its early use in the Church ;—and 3dly, the reasonableness of some provision of this kind being made in behalf of its youthful members.

1. In requiring the standing of sponsors at the Baptism of children, the Church of Christ has not, perhaps, originated any peculiar system of her own. By some persons, this office has been supposed to be derived from a similar custom which, it is known, of old prevailed among the Jews, of having special witnesses at the time of the naming and circumcising any of their own children ¹. This custom may, very

¹ Buxtorf. in Synag. Ind., referred to by Wall, vol. i. Intro. p. 35.

possibly, be alluded to in Isaiah viii. 2, where, in reference to the name "*Maher-shalal-hashbaz*," which God required the prophet Isaiah to give to his son, he says, "I took me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah²."

Or it may be derived from a similar custom which the Jews had of old, whenever they baptized persons not of their own nation, converts from among the heathen, as Jewish writers inform us that they were wont to do, before admitting them as proselytes to the sacrifices and services of their ritual³. For their custom was, that these converts, at this their ceremonial baptism, had to make solemn stipulation (that is, to covenant and promise, in the way of answering to interrogatories formally put to them) that they renounced idolatry, and also that they believed in Jehovah; and it was required that three persons, or two at the least, should be present, as witnesses to their baptism, and to the promises which they then made. Moreover, as children and infants were by no means excluded from being thus made proselytes, their custom was that these witnesses, in their case, should answer the interrogatories in their name, and make profession for them⁴, just as, at the Bap-

² Junius and Tremel. in Isa. viii. 2, referred to by Nicholson on Ch. Catechism.

³ Maimonides, referred to by Wall, vol. i. Introd.

⁴ Children were accounted by the Jews unable to profess

tism of infants in the Christian Church, the godparents do.

Such were the practices existing among the Jews, which may have given rise to the institution of Christian sponsors. And when we remember that even the baptizing of infants, though no where formally commanded, was from the very first practised in the Church, as having been a custom not unusual among the Jews, and never rescinded by our Lord, we shall regard it as most probably the case that the origin of the institution of sponsors at such Baptisms among Christians is to be traced to the existence of the similar custom among them.

2. We turn next to the evidence which may be found of the *early use* among Christians of this sponsorial office. There can be little doubt that the office under some form has always practically existed in the Christian Church. Indeed, we may speak more definitely still; there can be little doubt that from the beginning Christian Baptism was *never* administered to an infant but with some sufficient adult security that the child should be duly trained in the knowledge of his blessed membership in Christ, and the duties of his Christian faith. We may be led to this conclusion by what has

for themselves under thirteen years of age if boys, under twelve if girls. Maimonides, apud Wall, vol. i. p. 17.

been said of the probable origin of the institution. For, if derived at all from the Jewish practice, the manifest probability is that it was derived at once, and from the very first, while Jewish customs were yet fresh to the recollection of Christians. But to the same conclusion we may be likewise led by observing the holy jealousy manifested both by our Lord and His Apostles lest any gift of grace should be neglected or profaned. "*Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they [i. e. the swine] trample them under their feet, and [the dogs] turn again and rend you*." This was the caution which our Lord gave. And to the like effect St. Paul says to the Corinthians, "*We beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain*." While they thus speak it cannot be that they were willing to sanction the baptizing of any child whose guardianship and training were likely to be entrusted only to unbelievers and persecutors. And, consistently herewith, we find that whatever instances of children's Baptisms the New Testament may be supposed to record, these instances are only of children plainly thrown within the reach of Christian care and training. I refer you to the places in which are recorded the Baptism of whole households; as that of Stephanas⁷, and of Lydia⁸, and of the jailor at

⁵ Matt. vii. 6.⁶ 2 Cor. vi. 1.⁷ 1 Cor. i. 16.⁸ Acts xvi. 15.

Philippi⁹. If children in part composed any of these households (as it is not unreasonable to suppose they did), and were consequently baptized with the rest, then these children were just those for whom the proper security was evidently provided, in "the church which was in their house." Now these Baptisms of whole households are the *only* cases in which the fact of any infant Baptism seems probably recorded in Holy Scripture. The whole, therefore, so far as it goes, falls in consistently with the principle which we might expect to find observed, viz., that those only were to be baptized in infancy for whom there appeared sufficient security provided that a Christian influence would be exercised in their education; that so none who were God's children in Christ might fail of being brought up according to the Apostle's rule, "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

But, however little weight may be attached to this argument, the allusions to sponsors which are occasionally to be found in some of the most ancient Christian writers are plain evidence in favour of a very early reception of the office in the Church.

Tertullian is perhaps the most ancient of these writers, who speaks of sponsors at infant Baptism; and his testimony dates so far back

⁹ Acts xvi. 33.

as about 100 years only after the time of the Apostles [A.D. 200]. He speaks by name of "sponsors" for little children who are baptized; he makes mention of promises as made by them in the children's behalf; and he plainly intimates that this was the received practice of the Church, that sponsors should answer for infants who could not answer for themselves¹. It is, indeed, but a passing allusion which he makes; but this only renders his evidence the stronger, as showing that it was a well-known thing which needed no explanation.

St. Augustine [A.D. 388] supplies us with several testimonies to the use of sponsors for infants as an established custom prevailing in his day. Thus, in his work on Baptism, he says, "Where shall we rank little children but among 'the faithful?' for this privilege is theirs by virtue of their Baptism, and the answer of those who present them." And again, speaking of infants, he says, "When others answer for them, in order that the ministration of the Sacrament

¹ Tertullian de Bapt. § 18. His words are these: "Ceterum baptismum non temere credendum esse, sciunt quorum officium est. . . . Itaque pro cujusque personæ conditione ac dispositione, etiam ætate, cunctatio baptismi utilior est, præcipue tamen circa parvulos. Quid enim necesse est sponsors etiam periculo ingeri, qui et ipsi per mortalitatem destituere promissiones suas possunt, et proventu malæ indolis falli?" Tertullian must here be taken as evidence to matters of fact only.

in their case may be complete, this surety avails for their consecration, because they cannot answer for themselves¹." But his most remarkable testimony on this subject is contained in his letter to Bishop Boniface². This bishop had written to him respecting the propriety of promises being made in the name of infants by their sponsors, requesting, not for his own sake, but for the sake of others who were perplexed, that he would furnish him with some explanation of the reasonableness of that custom. St. Augustine replies at some length, showing in what sense those promises made for infants may be understood consistently with truth. All, however, which it is necessary for us here to notice in his reply, is that he describes the stipulations at Baptism as "words of the Sacrament without which an infant cannot be baptized;" and speaks of sponsors answering in the infant's name as a custom not only "most firmly established," but one "very wholesome."

But I must not weary out my reader with quotations, which are required rather for the scholar than for the simple ordinary Christian. I shall, therefore, only give references in the margin to other early Christian writers who have alluded to the subject of sponsors for

¹ S. Aug. de Baptismo contra Donatistas, lib. i. 25; iv. 24. See also S. Aug. de Peccator. Meritis, lib. i. 34.

² S. Aug. Epist. 98 (al. 23) ad Bonifacium.

infants⁴; supplying, in an Appendix⁵, a translation of one or two of the more important of them, which may be found instructive to the general reader. This only I would add here, that in no ancient Christian writer is the office spoken of as a novelty of his times, or one the use of which was peculiar to any particular country or Church; nor can it any where be shown that it was ever the Church's custom to omit or modify the usual form of stipulation, which must, therefore, of necessity have been made for them in their name by others, whenever infants were publicly baptized.

3. So much, then, for the origin and evident antiquity of the custom of which we speak. I have, thirdly, to show the reasonableness of some such institution in the Church, in behalf of its younger members. For we would have it based not upon a mere deference to authorities however good or ancient, which may testify to the fact of its early reception, but would know the reasonableness of that which comes so recommended: we would receive it not as a custom merely, but as a beneficial custom; nor

(alias S. Aug. de
Serm. 267 (alias
Areop. cap. 7,
M. op.), quæst. 56.
Bened.) Gennad.

be satisfied with its antiquity, unless we can satisfactorily discover its present adaptation to some good end.

It is in reference to the nature of *Baptism* that this sponsorial office commends itself as reasonable. With controversial views of Baptism we have nothing to do: all which it is now necessary to our point to bring forward is this: in Baptism, rightly received, there is a certain grace or free blessing vouchsafed to us of God in Christ: for Christ would never have ordained for His Church a perpetual Sacrament which He would not own and bless. This blessing is not one participated in only at the time of Baptism, and then concluded; it is given as a possession in perpetuity; not as a temporary grace only, but as a continuous state of grace. It is a blessing, however, which is not indefectible; on God's part, indeed, it is secure, but on our part it may be forfeited and lost; and for its preservation there are required of us the indispensable conditions of Christian repentance and faith.

Now the great principle, that in Baptism rightly received there is an inward grace vouchsafed, and a blessing of the character we have described, affords sufficient reason (especially in the case of infants) for the use of sponsors. God's gifts, whether temporal or spiritual, involve solemn responsibilities—they may not, without great sin, be slighted, or perverted, or unimproved. And if the Church be the channel

and instrument whereby any of God's gifts are conveyed, her trust is an important one, and one which needs the utmost precaution, lest she become in any way a party to the neglect. Would she not, therefore, be to blame, if there were not, at the time of Baptism, a full and clear recognition made of the nature of the gift, and the conditions on which that blessing was bestowed ; or if there were not means provided, as far as possible, for bringing the recipient to the knowledge of his Christian covenant and the way of salvation? Especially when it is considered how lamentable might be to him the consequences of the neglect: for still "the wages of sin is death," even though the gift of God be eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord ; and still our sins may return unforgiven upon our heads though the gift of forgiveness has once been received.

To guard, then, against such evils, is the end and design of the office of sponsor. How the sponsors are required to effect this, will be discussed when we come to speak of the several duties in detail. But let this be regarded as the general design of the institution ;—it is a provision, that, as far as possible, when holy Baptism is administered to infants, the Church may not have to answer for the sin, either of profaning God's blessings, or obscuring its conditions.

CHAPTER II.

THE SPECIAL REGULATIONS RESPECTING SPONSORS, LAID DOWN IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

HITHERTO I have spoken of the office of sponsors, as it is an institution of the whole Church of Christ. I shall now speak of it in connexion with certain points of practical detail, which, as falling within the province of any particular Church to regulate, our own Church, the Church of England, with a view to edification, has seen fit to enjoin upon her members.

We may notice in particular these three points:

1. The sponsors at Baptism are required by our Church to be three in number: two godfathers and one godmother, or two godmothers and one godfather, according to the sex of the child to be baptized¹.

2. They are required to be persons who have received the Holy Communion².

¹ "And note, that there shall be for every male child to be baptized, two godfathers and one godmother; and for every female one godfather and two godmothers."—*Rubric before "The Ministration of Public Baptism of Infants."*

² "Neither shall any person be admitted godfather or godmother to any child at Christening . . . before the said per-

3. They are not to be the parents of the child³.

The first of these particulars relates merely to the *number* of sponsors in each case required. In itself, the precise number is, of course, a thing indifferent; and indeed in different Churches, and at different times, the number required has been various. Three (two and one of either sex) is the number required in our own Church, and it has been with us the same for at least 600 years, or very possibly for a much longer period⁴. And this number of *three* is perhaps as convenient as any which could be chosen. Three is a number which affords full legal evidence—"In the mouths of two or three witnesses shall every word be established⁵," and a number which may be regarded as sufficient to constitute a complete company or society. (*Ubi tres ibi ecclesia.*) A smaller number would materially have diminished the security which the Church would have for the spiritual nurture and admonition
son so undertaking hath received the Holy Communion."—*Canon xxix.* (1603).

³ "Fathers not to be godfathers in Baptism, &c. No parent shall . . . be admitted to answer as godfather for his own child."—*Canon xxix.* (1603). The mention of "fathers" only in the title, may possibly be because this canon was mainly directed against those who claimed to have children baptized on a profession of the father's faith.

⁴ "Statuimus ne in Baptismate plures quam tres suscipiant puerum de sacro fonte; masculum duo mares, et una mulier; fœminam, duo fœminæ, et unus mas."—Council of York, 1195. Wilkins, vol. i. p. 501.

⁵ 2 Cor. xiii. 1. Matt. xviii. 16.

of the child: a larger number required, would have increased the difficulty experienced in procuring proper sponsors, while perhaps the sense of individual responsibility in each might very possibly (though erroneously) have been lessened by any addition to the number of co-sponsors. In short, of however small importance this matter may be, it appears, as it stands, to be wisely regulated, and no material objection can be raised against it.

The second point which has to be noticed relates to the due qualification of those who undertake. The Canon (Can. 29, A.D. 1603) provides that they must be persons who have received the Holy Communion. And there is great benefit resulting from this regulation.

1. It necessarily ensures, that sponsors shall have been themselves *baptized*. And most unseemly and absurd would it be for one who valued not Baptism for himself to be permitted to ask it in behalf of another, or to give pledges in the name of another, while in his own name and person he was unpledged.

2. It ensures, moreover, that sponsors shall be of *an age of discretion*, and, so far as may be, duly instructed. And indeed how could it be fitting that it should be otherwise, for then he who has to be the agent and surety of the child would have need himself to be represented by an agent equally with the child himself?

3. Again, it ensures that they be persons

who have been approved by the Bishop, and *made partakers of the rite of Confirmation*. And who can doubt how much they need to have sought the help of God's Holy Spirit, when, it may be, the destinies not of their own souls only, but of another immortal soul consigned to their watchfulness may depend upon their own "knowledge of God's grace and faith in Him."

4. And lastly it ensures, yet more expressly that *they have become communicants*. And must not this be a necessary qualification for such as would undertake the office? Is it not necessary that they who are to be the spiritual fathers, and guardians, and remembrancers of others, should themselves be men in Christ, in full communion in that fellowship into the first stage of which their godchild is to be admitted, and competent to teach by their example as well as by their words? And of course the more faithful and consistent is their Christian life, the better. For indeed the Church would desire yet more than their having been once only or twice communicants. She has sufficiently marked out her meaning by the rule as it stands—it is for her faithful members to act upon its spirit; and to choose rather as sponsors *habitual* partakers at her altar, and those who, by the help of God's grace, are themselves seeking daily to proceed in all virtue and godliness of living.

Such are the qualifications which our Church requires in her sponsors. It is true, indeed,

that this regulation is too often neglected: you may say it is obsolete; you may say it is difficult to be carried out. But, be it remembered, such is still the rule of the Church, and as such it is binding upon us, whether as parents or as ministers in the Church, to endeavour to carry out its requirement⁶. At least, while we neglect the rule, we cannot justly complain if the institution of sponsors sometimes fails to effect its intended purpose.

The third point we have named as specially ruled by our Church is, that the sponsors (the selection of whom naturally belongs to the parents or guardians of the child) are not to be the parents themselves. This regulation is not peculiar to our own portion of the Church Catholic. It is one, moreover, which was very early adopted; and it is found enjoined by provincial councils of the Church as far back as the year of our Lord 813⁷.

And here it will naturally be asked, on what grounds we may suppose our Church has re-

⁶ It would not, indeed, be expedient, or even practicable, for the clergy to insist, in all cases, on a strict observance of this rule, as things now are. A neglect of long standing admits not of a sudden reform. Much improvement, however, might be effected gradually; and it might be found useful if every parish priest made inquiry beforehand who the proposed sponsors were to be, with a view to their being persons fitly chosen. [So Council of Trent, Sess. xxiv. 2.]

⁷ Council of Mentz, Can. 55, A.D. 813, and Council of Arles, Can. 19, A.D. 813.

ceived and retained this regulation. There is, indeed, no express declaration of our Church on this point to which we can appeal. But it will not be difficult to assign *good* reasons sufficient to make us acquiesce in its adoption, even though, in the absence of authentic proof, we can only guess at the *true*.

It is not retained as if a spiritual relationship (such as that which exists between a parent and a sponsor to the same child) were any such sort of relationship or affinity as would render unlawful the matrimony of those who were so related. It is, indeed, professedly upon the ground of this opinion that the Church of Rome rejects the sponsorship both of parents and of others besides⁸. But our own tables of prohibited marriages are happily free from such artificial and arbitrary, as well as inconvenient, restrictions; and this forbids us to suppose that in our own Church this regulation is now to be ascribed to any opinion of this kind.

Nor is it retained on the ground of any natural disqualification unfitting the parent, as such, for the office of sponsor, as being the author of the child's guilt in Adam. This notion is altogether an unauthorized and private fancy. Originally, indeed, it appears there existed no restriction by which the parent was excluded from presenting his own children⁹;

⁸ See Appendix.

⁹ See S. Aug. Ep. 98 (al. 23) ad Bonifacium, § 6.

and this is sufficient to assure us that in itself the office is at least as fitting to him as to any other person.

The regulation, however, which excludes him may sufficiently be justified on the ground of its usefulness in many respects.

1. It affords to the Church an increased security for the proper instruction of the child. For a parent, as such (and much more a Christian parent), is already by nature bound to train up his own child aright. By any sponsorship, therefore, undertaken by him, no increased security is really gained; whereas, if others undertake, then is the security extended, and they become, as it were, bail or sureties for the parent that he shall fulfil his proper duty.

2. It enables the whole Christian body the more completely to realize that in Christ Jesus they are not separate families, having separate interests and separate relatives, but are in truth but one brotherhood—"all one in Christ." Men may seek for it as they will,—the philosopher in his unreal Utopias, the Socialist in his artificial combinations; but the only communism to be found adapted for man in truth and purity is that of the Gospel in this sacred brotherhood. Here we meet together in one, not merely in respect to our common humanity, but in respect to our common Adoption, and our common joint Inheritance in heaven. Now this regulation seems

to be one based upon this very principle, and to be admirably fitted to exhibit it, as a reality. On the one hand, it makes the office open to all, and appropriate to all, irrespective of all earthly distinctions and earthly connexions (the parents only being excepted); thereby implying that we are all members in one body, and have all the same care one for another. And on the other hand, the very exception which it makes points the same way. For this serves to guard lest perchance, the standing of parents for their children easily growing into a custom, the title to the office should come to be based on their relation as parents, and that common interest one for another be obscured and lost sight of, which otherwise the office would be so well calculated to keep in view.

3. It serves as a bulwark against a very mistaken notion which has sometimes prevailed, that only those persons have, in infancy, a right to Christian Baptism, whose parents (or at least one of them) are Christians; as if the promises of the Gospel, as far as infants are concerned, were only to the seed of believers, while all other children must wait to riper years and be baptized on their own actual profession. This we find was made the ground of one of the "exceptions against the Book of Common Prayer," which were presented at the Savoy conference in the year 1661. The objectors contended that the covenant of God was to the

seed of believers only, and they therefore desired that the only profession required to be made at the Baptism of infants, should be a profession on the part of the parents, or pro-parents, of their own faith. The reply of the Bishops to this point was—"It is an erroneous doctrine, and the ground of many others, that children have no other right to Baptism than in their parents' right," &c.¹

The error appears to have been founded on a mistaken interpretation of certain passages of Holy Scripture.

For example, the words of St. Peter², "*the promise is to you and to your children*," have been taken as giving to the children born of believing parents, as such, some peculiar right to admission into the Christian covenant. The words which follow, "*and to all that are afar off*," show that the Apostle is, in fact, declaring the universality of the Gospel call.

Again the words of St. Paul in 1 Cor. vii. 14 have been similarly misapplied. The Apostle is earnestly recommending the husband or wife, who may have become Christian, still, if possible, to continue to live with his unbelieving partner. And then he says, "*For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband, else were your children*

¹ Cardwell's Conferences, pp. 324. 326. 355. See Stillingfleet's Unreasonableness of Separation, part 3, § 36.

² Acts ii. 39.

unclean, but now are they holy." The passage is a difficult one. The most simple interpretation (as it appears to me) is this :—that the Apostle here enforces his recommendation, by asserting the sacred obligation of the marriage bond, even though it had been contracted not as a Christian rite, but while both parties were still unbelievers. The unbelieving husband (he says) is sanctified (ἐν τῇ γυναίκί), literally, *in the wife*, that is, in the use of the marriage bond, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified (ἐν τῷ ἀνδρὶ) *in the husband*. Their marriage, contracted before admission into the Christian covenant, is not voided by admission, nor needs a renewed sanction by the Christian rite of matrimony. The original divine institution is to them a sufficient sanction for the *sanctity* or purity of their union, and for its consequent obligation. And in proof of his assertion he appeals to the condition of their children, who are undoubtedly to be regarded as *lawfully begotten* by virtue of that marriage bond which they had contracted : "else were your children unclean, but now are they holy." The more usual interpretation of the verse is to take the words *sanctified* and *holy* not as implying *legitimacy* of marriage, or of birth, but in their more usual sense, as referring to the sanctification of Christian baptism : just as all Christians in the New Testament are called saints, or holy persons. According to this mode, the Apostle enforces his recommend-

ation about living together, by asserting here the great probability there is of the believing partner becoming the means of bringing the unbelieving to Christian faith and baptism. "The unbelieving husband is (or has commonly been) sanctified by the [we must suppose, believing] wife, and the unbelieving wife is (or has commonly been) sanctified by the [believing] husband." And when, in proof of this assertion, he appeals to the condition of their children, he means,—if it were not so, and if the infidelity of the unbelieving party did generally prevail, the children of such parents would be generally kept unbaptized, and so unclean; but now we see they are generally baptized, and so made Christians, or holy ones, which shows that the influence of the Christian party is usually the stronger³.

It is, however, of little importance to our present purpose to decide which of these interpretations is to be preferred. It is sufficient for us to see that neither in this passage, nor in the other passage from the Acts of the Apostles, is there any thing said which might authorize us to infer that children having a believing parent are therefore as such "relatively and privilegially holy," and possessed of a title to

³ S. Aug. de Sermone Domini, lib. i. 27. De Peccator. Meritis, lib. iii. 12. Wall on Infant Bapt., vol. i. p. 182. Hammond's Practical Catechism, vi. § 3.

Holy Baptism which they would not otherwise have had.

There needs, indeed, but little argument to show the error of such an opinion. How inconsistent is it with the great doctrine that we are all alike born into the world, lost and condemned, through Adam's fall; and, on account of the inherited evil of our nature, all alike without any personal or inherited claim or title of any kind to the mercy and love of God. How inconsistent with the great truth that Christ died for all, and that God is "no respecter of persons," is it, that He should be more ready to accept the child of one than the child of another, for both of whom the Saviour shed His precious blood. And how strangely does it mingle up things natural and things spiritual, while it supposes that natural birth could impart any right to a heavenly adoption, or that one child could be less the child of wrath than another, because the natural parent of one was a partaker of spiritual grace.

Against the error, then, of supposing that Christian parentage is requisite to give to an infant a title to be admitted to Christian Baptism, this regulation of the Church not merely not requiring parents to act, but even excluding them from acting, as sponsors to their own children, forms a plainly significant protest. An infant (or other minor) may not, indeed, be presented for Baptism without the consent of the parents,

or at the least of the father, if he be living, nor without the consent of his lawful guardians, if he be deprived of his natural parents' care. The *unwillingness* of parents may debar the child; nature tells us this, and there is nothing in this regulation which runs counter to it. But their *unbelievingness* may not debar him. His right to Baptism, or capacity for it, is not contingent upon his having been born of Christian parents, or upon any subsequent profession by them of the Christian faith. It is his by virtue of Christ's death: there can be no birth-disqualification to exclude him from Baptism. His parents, for example, may have died in heathenism, or they may be living as heathens still; yet should he, by the chances of war, or otherwise, have passed into Christian hands, or should the parents themselves willingly give up the child for Christian education, the sacrament of Baptism may not justly be denied him⁴. To the granting of that privilege this rule, affords every facility; for while it certainly would allow none to usurp the office of sponsor, and clandestinely, without the parental authority, to present a child for Baptism, it requires no necessary parental security, but provides that others than the parents shall fill the sponsor's part. And it suffices to justify the wisdom of the rule that it avails to such practical results.

⁴ S. Aug. de Gratiis, § 22. S. Cyp. Ep. 64, § 5, ad Fidum.

CHAPTER III.

THE DUTIES OF SPONSORS.—THOSE WHICH HAVE
TO BE FULFILLED AT THE TIME OF THE MI-
NISTRATION OF BAPTISM.

WE must now enter upon a more practical part of our subject, namely, to enumerate the several DUTIES which belong to the sponsor's office; explaining their importance, and the spirit in which they should be undertaken. Of these duties some are more easy, some more difficult, to fulfil; some it is not likely for any to fail in, others are too frequently neglected; some are wholly completed at the time of the baptizing of the infant Christian for whom they stand, others more or less incumbent upon them as long as both parties live; some have their use at first sight apparent,—and even those duties which seem in themselves less necessary or important, are yet, it will be seen, in some degree useful when rightly understood, as possessing a hidden meaning, and illustrative of some important truth. We will take them in the order in which they naturally fall under our notice.

I. The first duty of their office which has to

be attended to by the sponsors is simply *to bring the child, and present it at the font*. An easy duty is this to perform; but it is one which, as has been just observed, has a meaning in it which ought not to be overlooked. The sponsors in this portion of their office represent the entire Church on earth¹. And when the parent who is desirous that his infant should become the child of God, and be enlisted into the army of Christ's followers, chooses god-fathers and godmothers to present him to the Lord, he should regard it that he commits his child unto them, as unto the whole communion of the faithful; and that by them his child is given unto God, as the common offering made by all. The entire Church is, we know, too widely diffused in the world that it should be possible for an infant to be actually presented as the gift of all. But it is done as truly in an emblem, when the sponsors, acting not merely for the parents, not merely for the congregation then assembled, but for the whole Church militant every where on earth, present him, humbly calling on their Heavenly Father to own as His child this nursling of His Church. And great is the encouragement which the parent may draw from this view of the office.

¹ "Offeruntur parvuli ad percipiendam spiritualem gratiam non tam ab iis quorum gestantur manibus (quamvis et ab ipsis, si et ipsi boni fideles sint) quam ab universâ societate sanctorum et fidelium." S. Aug. ad Bonif. § 5.

"I do not presume," he may say, "to ask so great mercies of myself alone. Perhaps I am unworthy to say, 'Grant that this my child may be made an inheritor of Thy kingdom;' but God will graciously hear the voice of His Church; if in Christ's name His household importune, or if 'two or three' representing His household importune, He will not refuse my desire."

This part of the sponsor's office (when thus regarded) may, moreover, forcibly remind us of the interest which we *all* ought to take in one another's edification. For these godfathers and godmothers, as in presenting the child they act in the name of the whole Church, so do they pledge the whole Church in its behalf. It is true they take special engagements upon themselves with immediate reference to the child they present; but not so as to set free the diffusive body of the Church who present by them from an interest and concern about that child's Christian welfare. A solemn responsibility still rests upon the whole Church generally, in behalf of her infant members generally, whom in her name her sponsors have presented at the baptismal font. And hence, though we may never have actually stood sponsor for any particular child, we are none of us wholly free from sponsorial duties; but each one, as part of the body, is a sharer in the general responsibility. Indeed, we cannot regard ourselves as separate one from another, or as having no

reason to concern ourselves in the state of other Christians, for we are knit together by our brotherhood in Christ. But it is especially our duty to concern ourselves in behalf of those who are rising up to succeed us when we, their elders, shall have left this scene of present life; that they shall inherit the same faith which we have received from our fathers, neither diminished, nor increased, nor changed. The whole body of the faithful has virtually presented them, and henceforth their guardianship may be wholly disowned by none. "The fathers to the children shall make known Thy truth²."

II. The second duty which sponsors have to fulfil is almost implied by their act of presenting the child at the font. It is this: that having previously duly informed their own minds, they reply to the questions which may be put to them by the minister at the font before the service actually begins. If the child they present be brought for Baptism, they must have satisfied themselves that they may correctly answer in the negative to the single inquiry, *Hath this child been already baptized, or no?* If it be brought to be "received as one of the flock of Christ," after private Baptism, and that private Baptism happens to have been performed by some other minister than he who now officiates, they must be prepared to answer to that ques-

² Isa. xxxviii. 19.

tion in the affirmative. And then, moreover, when further examined thus :

“By whom was this child baptized?”

“Who was present when this child was baptized?”

“With what matter was this child baptized?”

“With what words was this child baptized?”

they must be prepared, in reply to these several questions, to give the name of the minister who performed the baptism ;—to state, at least, one person (the nurse, or the mother, or the doctor) who witnessed it ;—and to testify, to the best of their knowledge, that the child was duly baptized “*with water*,” which is called the MATTER of the Sacrament ;—and “*in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*,” which are called the WORDS of the Sacrament, as appointed by Christ. These last two points (the water and the true form of words) are “*essential parts of Baptism*,” and therefore any incorrect administration in these parts would, in fact, be no Baptism. If therefore, with regard to the administration in these essentials, the information obtained be in any way obscure and uncertain, the sponsor should state the circumstances, that the minister may act according to his own discretion in the baptizing or receiving of the child.

In this way, through the instrumentality of

sponsors, two benefits are secured : not only may the delusion of an unreal baptism be detected, but precaution is taken against the performance of the unmeaning ceremony of what might seem a second Baptism. For as there is but one Lord and one faith—as there is but one body and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling ; so there is but one Baptism, one for all, and one for each who are made members of Christ : and that one Baptism can only be according to the Institution of Christ Himself.

III. The third duty which belongs to the godfather or godmother is to pronounce certain answers or stipulations³ in the name of the child. What these stipulations are, and the nature of the interrogatories in answer to which they are made, you may readily ascertain by a reference to the Baptismal Service. It will there be seen that, together with an answer of assent to be baptized in the Christian faith, they consist of a threefold solemn profession :—

1. Of renunciation of the devil, the world, and the flesh.

2. Of faith according to the form of words in the Apostles' creed.

3. Of the purpose to lead an obedient and holy life.

³ A stipulation signifies a form of contract or profession in which a question being put, he who is asked pledges himself by the reply he makes. See Hooker, E. P. v. 64. 4.

These stipulations, then, of assent and profession, the sponsors have to make in the name of the child. They are not now consenting to, or professing any thing directly for themselves⁴, for example, that *they* will be baptized, or that they believe or desire to keep God's commandments. Their own stipulations to that effect were made at their *own* Baptism, and ratified by them, on the occasion of their confirmation. Nor are they themselves promising or guaranteeing in respect to the child that *he* shall believe, or shall keep God's commandments. This would indeed be an act of rashness which none but fools would attempt. The stipulations which they now pronounce are to be viewed as virtually pronounced by the child. They are, as it were, *his* solemn declaration that there is, at least, no bar of actual impenitence, or unbelief, or purposed sin, to exclude him from Baptism. It is the child, therefore, it will be observed, and not the sponsors, to whom the questions are addressed ; and the child, who now, as a Christian, is bound to live henceforth according to these essential rules of the Christian profession. So that, in fact, the sponsors are here nothing more than the proxies or spokesmen of the child, doing for him that part of the transaction which he is not able to perform by reason of his infancy.

⁴ See Chapter V., objection 2.

The nature of this part of the ceremony is precisely similar to that of sponsorial contracts in secular concerns. If any property, or office, or dignity, devolves upon a minor, consent thereto may at once be given by his parent or guardian in his name; for, whether he understand it or not, a minor is supposed to consent to whatever, in the judgment of the lawful person, is supposed to be for his good. Moreover, if it be necessary that certain engagements be entered into, as the conditions on which that office or property be inherited, those conditions, though he be too young to understand them, may be made for him by his guardians; they sign in his name the required bonds, that so he may at once inherit; and when he comes of age, it is known and understood on what terms his office or property is held. James I. of England was a minor when he was crowned King of Scotland; and his case may be taken as an instance in point. The usual pledges had to be given, and promises to be made, which the laws of the country demand at a coronation, from their new sovereign. These he could not be supposed capable of understanding, nor, in his own person, of contracting. The manner, therefore, of his contracting was by sponsors; the questions were propounded to him and answered for him by those in whose hands he was placed; and, so long as he remained king, the duties thus imposed were as binding upon

him as if he had contracted in his own person⁵. So it is in the Baptism of infants; they promise by their sureties; which promise, when they come to age, themselves are bound to perform. And in both cases the use of this particular form of stipulation is in order to mark out as distinctly as possible the party whom the transaction principally concerns⁶.

So much, then (for the present), for the fitness of the *form* in which the baptismal engagements of infants are professed. It may be useful to remind the sponsor of the necessity of the profession itself. Baptism, without a plain declaration, somehow made, for the infant baptized of the solemn conditions with which it was connected, might lead him to serious error. He might then grow up and altogether mistake the tenure by which he held the free gift made to him in that Sacrament. He might fall into that delusion of the Jews, and say confidently, "Are we not of Abraham's seed—are we not heirs of the promises?" and rest presumptuously in the fact of his having been called to the state of salvation, forgetful that neither the having been baptized, and made a member of Christ and inheritor of heaven, nor any pledge or promise of God will prove a blessing to him whose heart follows after the devil, the world, and the

⁵ Dr. Barlow's Conference at Hampton Court. Cardwell's Conferences, p. 196.

⁶ Hooker, E. P. v. 64. 6.

flesh—whose faith is dead—by whom the will of God is unloved and unbeyed. Thus it is necessary that a plain and explicit statement be made of the terms upon which our inheritance is held. Even the infant must have his obligations openly recorded, though at present he can neither understand them nor fulfil them. They must, from the very first, even at his Baptism, be declared in his name, lest he afterwards complain that duties seemed to be added which entered not into the original contract.

And if these duties which are professed seem to any to be set too high, and almost beyond what we can attain unto, it must be replied, they are God's requirements; and can God's requirements be less than the highest reach of holiness? Would it be consistent with His perfect purity to have demanded a partial service, that we renounce *some* sins only, or observe in *some* respects the commands of God, or yield some doubting kind of faith? No; if He condescend to found a holy society upon earth, and to decree its laws, we must expect that these laws will be exalted like Himself; and as He decrees them so must they be professed, and, as far as they can be, obeyed. Nor may sponsors shrink back as supposing that they are arbitrarily binding, and pledging an unconscious infant to duties which he ought to be left free to choose and undertake for himself hereafter. For it is not the mere act of these

duties being professed which makes them binding upon any baptized person. They are no optional matter with us, apart from our acceptance of the covenant of Baptism and salvation by Christ. There is no membership in Christ without them. They are an essential part of that covenant, and involved in the very idea of a Christian. Whether, therefore, professed or not professed, they are equally binding ; and the infant who is bound (as he becomes capable) to believe and to do as his godfathers and godmothers have promised for him, is bound not because of their act in his behalf, but by the nature of the covenant entered into, and by the law of Him who by his own authority proposed it⁷.

Such is the nature of the baptismal stipulations. I have spoken of them as really made by the infant, and have said that the sponsors do not herein promise any thing for themselves. At the same time there are duties belonging to them indirectly arising from the part which they have taken in the transaction. What these duties are the service itself explains at large in the exhortation beginning " Forasmuch as this child hath promised by you, his sureties," &c. But as they are not duties which have yet to be attended to, it will be more in order to consider them in the next chapter, to which they properly belong.

⁷ See Sanderson de Oblig. Conscientiæ, Præl. iv.

IV. I proceed now to the fourth duty belonging to the office of sponsors⁸, which is to *pronounce the child's name*. And it behoves them also to be careful that that name (chosen as it naturally might be by the parents) be not heathenish, or wanton, or ridiculous, but such as may be connected with Christian recollections, or otherwise becoming to a Christian to bear⁹.

And here, perhaps, it may be asked why the name is not rather pronounced by the parents. Do we not, it may be said, universally acknowledge the giving of the name to be the parents' right? And yet the direction given in the service for Baptism is "*here the priest shall say to the godfathers and godmothers, Name this child;*" and again, in the Catechism, when it is asked, "*Who gave you this name?*" the answer is, "*My godfathers and godmothers in my Baptism.*"

⁸ In the public service after Private Baptism, the place where the name is demanded by the minister, and pronounced by the sponsor, is different. It is then just before the baptismal stipulations.

⁹ In the early Church, parents were wont to give to their children the names of Apostles, or other eminently holy men, as memorials of their examples, and incentives to imitate them. See Eusebius, H. E. vii. 25, and Valesius's note: S. Chrys. Or. de S. Miletio. S. Chrysostom (Hom. 21, on Gen. iv. 26) exhorts parents to the same effect. 'Εν αὐταῖς ψιλαῖς ταῖς προσηγορίαις πολὺ ἐναπόκειται πλοῦτος νοημάτων οὐ μόνον γὰρ τῶν γονέων ἐντεῦθεν δέκνυνται τὸ φιλόθεον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ πολλὴ περὶ τοῦ παῖδος αὐτῶν ἐπιμέλεια, κ. τ. λ. See also Wheatly on the Book of Common Prayer, vii. 63. 2.

This point is well worthy to be noticed and explained, for it may serve to impress upon the mind the whole meaning of this Sacrament. It is true, most assuredly, that the giving of the name is a *parental right*. But it may be shown that it is on the very ground of this *parental right* that the name is pronounced, as the Prayer Book directs, by the godfathers and godmothers. For what is Baptism but the being born by grace into the family of God, and made a member of Christ's Universal Church. And here who can claim the father's right in respect of the infant baptized, but Almighty God Himself, Who, in the bestowal of His regenerating grace, declares, "I will be a Father unto them, and they shall be my sons and daughters?" And who can claim the *mother's right* in that mysterious spiritual birth, but she by whom it is brought to the font, even the Church Universal, whom the sponsors in one point of view represent? It is then in exact conformity with parental rights that the name is pronounced by the godfathers and godmothers. As the very terms imply, they symbolize the child's Father and Mother in its divine birth, as it stands related to God and His Church, and in that capacity they fitly give its name. There is a birth by nature and there is a birth by grace. From our natural parents we have our birth by nature, and from them therefore we receive that which we call our family name; and from cus-

tom and convenience they give us that which they bear themselves. Our Christian birth is from a higher source, and our Christian name—the token of “that thing which by nature we cannot have,”—that name we receive not from our natural parents, nor is it as such their right to bestow it. It is given us by godfathers and godmothers, by those who stand to betoken our heavenly Parentage, in His great name, and in His behalf, to Whom alone the right of our naming belongs.

Such seems the reason why the pronouncing of the child's name is a duty assigned to the sponsors. And this assignment of the duty to them, when so understood, does not only fall in harmoniously with the whole character of the Sacrament of Baptism, but seems, as it were, to illustrate it and bring it the more prominently to view. This naming of the child at Baptism by godparents (unimportant as it is in itself) may serve to remind us that by the unseen blessing vouchsafed therein the infant is truly made God's child. It may serve to remind us that the baptized infant is henceforth to be considered as one of the congregation of Christ's flock, and, as a son with sons, may pray in our Lord's own words (which, we may observe, follow closely upon the act of Baptism), “Our Father which art in heaven.” It may serve to remind the sponsor of the endearing relationship in which he spiritually stands to the infant he

presents¹; and it may lead the child the more to attach a significance to his bearing a Christian name; teaching him to regard it as an ever-present memento of the sacred family unto which he belongs.

V. We come now to the fifth particular in the duties of the sponsors; one which immediately follows upon that which has been just spoken of. It is this: to be witnesses of the fact of the child (given by one of their number into the minister's hands) being truly and lawfully baptized. That is, they must observe that the Baptism is administered with the due application of *water* (whether it be by immersion or by affusion²), and "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

¹ "It savoureth" (says Hooker) "more of piety to give them their old accustomed name of fathers and mothers in God, whereby they are well put in mind what affection they ought to bear towards those innocents, for whose religious education the Church accepteth them as pledges."—Book v. 64, 5.

² Whenever occasion may require it, it is the duty of the godfathers and godmothers, before the act of Baptism is administered, to certify to the minister, as the case may be, that the child may well endure immersion, or that the child is weak, and cannot well endure it. (See Rubric.) When no certification of this kind is made, the minister is left free to baptize the child as he sees fit. It may be presumed, however, that he would adopt the way of affusion, or pouring water upon it, as the more usual, and the safer way in our climate.

This is required (1st) for the sake of securing a due publicity to the act. Our Saviour has given us a peculiarly solemn injunction that we "confess Him before men." Our faith must be professed openly, that all may see that we own Him for our Lord and Saviour Who died for us upon the cross. That solemn entrance into the Christian faith which is made at Baptism should especially have this public character, and be, even in the case of the infant, a confession before men. It were not fitly made with any kind of secrecy or shame; therefore are there witnesses summoned, not merely generally, as the whole congregation present are witnesses, but special and responsible witnesses, who may testify to the open performance of the holy rite.

And (2dly) since Baptism is by no means a mere profession on the part of men, but a sacramental means of grace, the presence of special witnesses is further required, as affording, both to the Church at large, and to the individual baptized, a ground of satisfaction and assurance on a subject of deepest interest. To the Church at large their presence is important, as affording the assurance that the Sacrament is not profaned or treated with contempt, or administered carelessly and imperfectly. To the person baptized it is important, as a standing evidence which may assure him of the fact of his Baptism. Let a man in later life be desirous of satisfying

himself on this point, and how would he most readily ascertain the fact? His own knowledge would necessarily be insufficient in respect to a circumstance which occurred to him when he was an infant. Perhaps he may never have been told in childhood of his Baptism, or taught definitely his Christian profession, as such; his parents, moreover, may be now no more, or he otherwise unable to inquire from them whether they took care that he should be brought unto Christ, in fulfilment of our Lord's command; it would in many cases yield him but little satisfaction to argue that the probability was that he had been baptized, because the custom was so general, or because his parents were professedly Christians; in his case there might yet have been some oversight, or neglect, or prejudice, whereby custom had been contravened, and Christian duty passed by. But let him recollect to have heard some neighbour styled his godfather, and he has, in this simple circumstance, the evidence he seeks for. He has no necessity to search him out, and hear from his lips the declaration made; yea, this neighbour may have departed from the scene of this present life, or be otherwise inaccessible; but to have once known him *as* his godfather, is to have known him as one who was a witness to the fact about which he inquires, and to have satisfactory proof that he had been baptized.

The simple act, then, of witnessing to the

Baptism, on the part of the sponsor, is no useless or unnecessary duty. In truth, if only this one simple duty be fulfilled (the simplest, perhaps, of all which the sponsor undertakes), the office approves itself as a wise and valuable appointment, which we should shrink from seeing neglected or misused. And he surely must be careless or irreligious who would not value the proof which assures him that he is even now in the unity of the Church, and that he has the glorious hope before him of one day sharing its triumphant state in heaven.

We have now considered, one by one, five different duties appertaining to the office of sponsors, which it devolves upon them to perform. They are these : to present the child at the font ;—to give the required information as to whether the child has been baptized or no ;—to make certain stipulations in its stead ;—to pronounce its name ;—and to witness to the fact of its Baptism.

These duties are all fully discharged at the very time of the performance of the sacred rite itself. But are all the duties which the office implies then completed ? On the contrary, it is then, when the priest has given them back the child, committing him, as it were, to their Christian care and charity, that the more arduous begin : it is then the sponsors enter upon those “ parts and duties ” of which they have need solemnly to

be put in mind by the minister, as they still stand there by the font, in the face of the whole congregation, and in the special presence of God Himself. These I shall proceed to review in the next chapter. Meanwhile, be it observed, we must not slight or disparage those which have been already noticed; they may seem easy to perform—mere ceremonies and rites—and so they are. But they have their meaning: they convey instruction, they teach duties; they are pictures to the senses of things to be comprehended by the understanding. The Church, in the establishing of these rites, has exhibited truths in a manner more plain than by words, more permanent than by tablets of brass.

There is one great principle which the whole seems particularly to exemplify, namely, the fellow-feeling and mutual assistance which should operate throughout the whole Church of Christ. Here are joints and bands which pervade the entire body, knitting the whole together, and ministering to it nourishment, that it may increase with the increase of God. As the ministry constitutes not only bands of unity to the *existing* Church, but also forms the connecting series which by successive joints through past ages links us with the holy Apostles, and our Divine Founder, Christ Himself; so is that office we have been now considering, the office of sponsors, a system which, transversely, as it were, interweaves, strengthens,

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and unites the whole. The one is like the woof, the other like the warp, in the web of the entire fabric, which on earth is being woven for heaven, together working out the grand idea, that there is "one body and one spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DUTIES OF SPONSORS, CONTINUED.—THOSE
WHICH HAVE TO BE FULFILLED THROUGHOUT
THE GODCHILD'S LIFE.

THE duties devolving upon godfathers and godmothers which have been already considered, were those which they have to discharge at the very time of the public administration of the Baptism itself. And now the sponsors leave the font; but not without having been first admonished (in the concluding part of the service) of great and sacred responsibilities still remaining upon them, and solemnly charged to fulfil them. They leave the font, years roll quickly on, the infant is becoming the child, the youth, or is hastening on toward riper age, and all the natural powers and faculties of life are gradually unfolding themselves in him. This is the time (and more onwards still) to which I have next to turn the reader's attention, and our inquiry must be how, henceforward, during all the progressive years of the godchild's life, the godfather, according as he has been admonished, may continue faithful to his office,

and fulfil the duties with which he has been charged.

The general nature and character of these duties may be determined by the nature of the occasion on which they were undertaken. That occasion, it is manifest, bore no reference to the mere interests of the present life. Godfathers and godmothers, therefore, are not bound, by virtue of their office, to provide for and sustain those whom they have presented at the font, or to act as their patrons, in advancing them in the world. Even though the natural parents be snatched away by the hand of death, or the child otherwise left friendless and unprotected, the sponsors, *as such*, do not become responsible for its temporal care; they are under no other obligation to become its earthly protectors or to provide for its maintenance, than the common law of Christian charity, which rests upon all. The occasion upon which their duties were undertaken (I mean, the Baptism of the child), was rather one which had exclusive reference to his spiritual interests and concerns in the covenant of Christ. The duties, therefore, of the sponsors must have the same spiritual character. The preservation of his new life, his growth in godliness, his preparation for eternity, both in body and in soul, these must be the objects about which they are concerned.

VI. With this understanding, we will con-

tinue the enumeration of sponsors' duties, which occupied us in the preceding chapter. And I place this as the sixth particular in the due discharge of their office, namely, *To see that the child be instructed, especially by means of the Church Catechism, in the knowledge of his Christian calling, and trained up in the practice of it.*

To this effect is the charge addressed to the sponsors in the Baptismal Service. "It is your parts and duties *to see* that this infant be taught, so soon as he shall be able to learn, what a solemn vow, promise, and profession he hath here made by you. And that he may know these things the better, ye shall call upon him to hear sermons, and chiefly ye shall *provide*, that he may learn the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments in the vulgar tongue, and all other things which a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health." They are reminded also, to "*take care* that he be further instructed in the Church Catechism." And lastly, because the bare knowledge or belief without a practical obedience in regard to these duties, would only increase his condemnation, it is required of them to *provide* "that the child may be virtuously brought up to lead a godly and a Christian life," &c. Such are the words of our Church in addressing her sponsors. They are equivalent to what was stated above: that it is their part and duty to see that the child is both instructed in the knowledge of

his Christian calling, and also trained up in the practice of it; or, more concisely still, to see that *the child is Christianly educated*, according to the teaching of the Church.

But, it will be asked, what is Christian education? It is not the mere setting forth speculatively, as before a pupil, the facts and doctrines of the Gospel, as one branch, amongst others, of useful learning necessary to be studied and known. It is not merely even the explaining, and proving, and recommending them to his choice and approval. Nay more, it is not merely even the inculcating a reverential respect for the Christian faith, and a strict observance of its religious duties. All this might be the education of a heathen. The education of a Christian (as such) implies the setting forth to him, as a fact, his own personal covenant state in Christ, and inculcating his hopes, his duties, his helps, as all resulting therefrom. He has been received in Holy Baptism: *therein* he has been made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of heaven: *therein*, also, he is bound to believe and to do as that covenant requires of him: *therein*, moreover, he has the assurance of being heard in prayer by a gracious and merciful Father, and entitled to the sacramental pledges of His grace. Then let him (over and above all other learning) be taught thankfully and lovingly to know what he is; what the state of salvation through Jesus Christ our

Lord in which by God's free mercy he is placed ; what the holy duties which that his state requires of him, and may enable him to fulfil ; what the means vouchsafed to him for continuing in that state : and let him be trained up in the practice of those duties, and to the use of those means of grace—God's holy word being his standard of truth, Christ Himself the blessed Exemplar set before him,—and this is Christian education. It will be found embodied in the teaching of the Church Catechism³, the use of which is therefore expressly required.

With respect, then, to this Christian education, the extent of the sponsors' obligation in behalf of their godchild is *to see* that it be duly enjoyed. The sponsors, it must be observed,

³ The following is a concise synopsis of the Catechism. The first, or introductory question points out to the child instructed his own personal concern in the instruction which follows. The rest explains to him

I. *The blessings of his Christian covenant,*

1. To be a member of Christ.
2. To be the child of God.
3. To be an inheritor of heaven.

II. *The duties of his Christian covenant,*

1. Repentance.
2. Faith.
3. Obedience.

III. *The helps of his Christian covenant,*

1. Prayer.
2. Sacraments.

The fourth answer in the Church Catechism may especially be noticed, as bringing together, in one view, all the chief points of Christian instruction in their mutual bearing.

are not required necessarily to become the child's instructors on these points, or to supply others to educate him. This duty rests upon the parents, or pro-parents. But they are required "to provide," or "to see" that (under the authority of those persons who may be responsible) he is rightly taught and trained. To take no pains to inquire and to assure themselves whether this be done, is to be unfaithful to their trust, to violate the pledge they had given before the Church, and to act as traitors to her cause. they have been received as bail, and upon them must fall the consequences of their neglect. Suppose, however, that, as far as they have opportunity, they do "see" into this matter; then if it appear, on their inquiry, that the child is duly taught, that he is sent to school, for example, where the Catechism is made the basis of Christian instruction, and that he is brought up to a lawful calling in life, so far their conscience may be satisfied in the discharge of this duty⁴; especially while they take such opportunities as may occur to call upon him diligently, to attend to the instructions he receives, whether in sermons, or in catechisings, or in the Word of God. If, however, it be discovered that Christian education is manifestly neglected, or the Catechism untaught, the office which they have undertaken imposes on them a

⁴ V. Th. Aquin. III. Quæst. 67. 8.

more direct interposition. It then becomes the part of a conscientious godfather to remonstrate with and warn the parents, as far as his influence may be available, and Christian discretion may allow it. Few parents, it may be hoped, would persist in their neglect after their error had been faithfully pointed out to them by their own chosen friend in an earnest and Christian spirit. Yet should this effort fail of success, it should be his care that the attention of the clergyman ministering in the parish should be especially directed to the child, that by his pastoral persuasion and watchfulness the lamb might not be left untended, nor the Church have to mourn that through her neglect the gift has been bestowed in vain.

Let such as desire faithfully to fulfil their duty as sponsors thus view their responsibility in regard to the godchild's education. Let them feel that they have to render in unto God an account of the trust placed in their hands, and that this question is demanded of them: "Are you satisfied that the child to whom you stood has been trained up in the knowledge and in the habits of Christian truth and godliness? To such an inquiry they must be able to reply that they *are* satisfied. Or, at least, they should be able to answer that, whatever palpable neglect there may have been in giving to the child a Christian education, that neglect they had, by warning and advice, faithfully

endeavoured to correct, to the utmost of their power, according to the circumstances in which they were placed, and the opportunities at their command. And so doing they may set their conscience at rest, and leave the result to God.

VII. The next particular to be noticed in the sponsor's duty is (as was the last) one of which they are especially reminded at the font. It is *to take care that the child at the proper time is brought to the bishop to be confirmed*. "Ye are to take care," are the words of our Church, "that this child be brought to the bishop to be confirmed of him as soon as he can say the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments in the vulgar tongue, and be further instructed in the Church Catechism set forth for that purpose." This is the admonition on this point which the sponsors receive.

The extent of the obligation is similar to that under the preceding head, and amounts to this: not that they themselves shall actually bring the child to confirmation, but to see that it is done; so that if, *through any mere carelessness*, it is not done, that is, the baptized person never is brought to be confirmed, then the guilt of that careless omission is laid to their account. Others, indeed, may, in their measure, be guilty; but the godfathers and godmothers are not the less so, for they have offered themselves, and been accepted as bail, and the duty was expressly

laid upon them to take care the confirmation was not neglected.

Nor is it an unreasonable thing that the sponsors should be parties upon whom this duty devolves. For if they have been called upon to see that the child receives from man a Christian education, it is but right that they should also be called upon to see that the child be at all times directed to the heavenly fount of spiritual nourishment and grace, to that Holy Spirit by Whom alone he may be confirmed and strengthened, and enabled unto the end to pursue the Christian life in which he has been trained. If in Baptism they have sought his admission into the fellowship of Christ, it is right that in the apostolic ordinance of confirmation they should bring him to partake more fully of the privileges of that fellowship, and see him, in unity with the body of the Church, passing under the hand of his bishop, himself the ambassador and representative of the one great Shepherd and Bishop of the flock.

And, further, since the administration of confirmation is very fitly made to the candidate an occasion for recording afresh his already existing obligations entered into in Baptism, and for publicly acknowledging that he is verily bound to believe and to do as his godfathers and godmothers have promised for him, the office of bringing their godchild to confirmation seems very appropriately to rest on the sponsors in

this respect also. For it is an opportunity of carrying out their great duty of seeing that his Christian duties are known and recognized ; and at the same time the occasion affords to them a kind of public testimony delivered from the lips of the godchild himself, that his sponsors' trust in his behalf has so far been faithfully fulfilled.

VIII. But again : although at confirmation the sponsors' trust in respect to the child's education is in a manner concluded, and they are now no longer considered bound over as a security to the Church for him, yet the office of sponsor may not even yet be deemed to have wholly terminated. When a son has grown up to man's estate, and is capable of acting independently, and free from the control of others, the relative duties of the parent towards that son have become greatly changed from what they were before ; but they have not wholly ceased. Just so it is in the case of the godparent. Confirmation has relieved him of his suretyship ; the time of his spiritual guardianship is expired, for the person confirmed is now "of age." But he is still his godfather, holding no mere nominal office, but the pledged remembrancer of his baptism ; and (since frequently no other godfather is appointed when the child is confirmed) the remembrancer of his confirmation also. In short, through life the sacred

relationship continues, imposing duties which remain to be exercised as opportunity is afforded.

This is plainly shown by the analogy of what takes place at the Baptism of adults. Godfathers and godmothers are appointed even for them. And can it be that godfathers and godmothers are not equally necessary for those who, baptized in infancy, have become adults, and that such relationship in their case should now have expired? Moreover, the very nature of our condition in this life seems to show how reasonable it is to regard the office as still continuing. For the whole of our life on earth is but our time of spiritual growth, and our school-time for eternity, in which we have to be "*continually* mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections and *daily* proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living." And as the temptations of life begin to grow about us, we have only the greater need of care and diligence that, "being made children of God and of the light, by faith in Christ Jesus," we may "walk answerably to our Christian calling, and as becometh the children of light, remembering always that Baptism doth represent unto us our profession^s." There is

^s "*Baptism doth represent unto us our profession.*" These words are perhaps liable to be taken in a sense far inadequate to that which they really have. "*Our profession*" means not the mere outward acknowledgment or show which we make in respect to religion, but our religious state, calling,

still, therefore, room and occasion for some friendly edifying; and, so long as such occasions continue, it must be a mistake for sponsors to deem themselves free from further services. They must have their duties still to fulfil; and this advice and aid ought to be received with deference still, not merely from the recollection of their past guardianship, but by virtue of a still existing office.

From these considerations, there must be added an eighth particular to our enumeration of sponsors' duties. It may be regarded as based upon the address which is made to godfathers and godmothers at the Baptism of adults, of which it is the sum and substance. And it is this: *To remind their godchild from time to time, as fitting occasion occurs, to continue faithful to his profession, and diligent in the use of the means of grace.*

Various are the details of duty which might be suggested to sponsors, under this head. It appertains to them, for instance, by precept

or condition, itself. And so, in secular matters, when we speak of a man's profession, we speak of him as a lawyer, or a physician, or a soldier, &c., not according to what he pretends to be, but according to what he is. Again "*to represent unto us,*" implies not merely to betoken, or symbolize, but has a more antiquated signification of "*to convey or give by token.*" The whole expression, then, "Baptism doth represent unto us our profession," is equivalent to saying Baptism doth convey to us, and invest us with that state, calling, condition, and obligation, which we have as members in Christ.

occasionally, by example at all times, to recommend to their godson the great advantage of regular assembling for public worship, and the importance of strict regard to church unity and discipline. It appertains to them to recommend to him the obligation of seeking the spiritual welfare of others at home and abroad, and of doing all things to the glory of his God and Saviour. But especially, as having been long the guardians of his spiritual life, begun in Baptism, it appertains to them also to see that their godchild, now confirmed, neglect not the privilege with which he is invested, of at once and often drawing near to partake in the Sacrament of the Holy Communion. He who hath said, "Except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," hath also said, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood ye have no life in you." And shall parents rejoice in the prosperity and manly strength of their offspring, and spiritual parents feel no holy concern that their godchildren may participate in that heavenly food, which may minister to the strengthening and refreshing of their souls?

But if (as we know by sad experience must sometimes be the case) an ungodly life disappoints the sponsor's hopes, and he sees his godson or goddaughter eagerly following, and led away by those things which he is bound to

renounce, and forgetful of the Christian faith and practice which he has professed, the god-father's parental affection and care will have to take a different and less pleasing course. The spiritual life he has been watching seems decaying ; the spark he has long been desirous of fanning is waning fast ; by every sin, by every neglect of religion, it is becoming more and more smothered and destroyed ; and shall he not seek, by every means in his power, to revive it ? Shall he not feel like a father at the sick bed of a dying son, and as if every duty and every affectionate feeling which the name of father implies, it were now more incumbent upon him than ever to exercise. He must set before him his baptismal calling, not its vows only, but its blessings also ; and must show him not only the sin of its broken obligations, but the danger of its forfeited grace. He must urge him, as he fears to be a child of the devil and an heir to eternal torments, as he prizes to continue a child of God, a member of Christ, and an inheritor of heaven, to remember the profession of a Christian, and, in repentance and faith, to seek for the renewal of the gracious promises of God which were made to him in that Sacrament. He must teach him, before it be too late, to arise and go to his still merciful Father, and to say unto Him, " Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy Son." And

let him persevere in this ; let him have faith that his labours will not be thrown away. The spark of grace within him may indeed, at present, yield neither warmth nor light, but it may still be there. It may yet be kindled into a flame, the feeble grace may, when least expected, revive again in true conversion ; and he who was in infancy made one of God's own children by the help of His renewing Spirit may arise, and lead what yet remains of his life "according to that beginning."

For other particulars relating to this head of the sponsors' duty, I would only refer my reader to the Second Epistle of St. Peter, chap. i. 1—13, and recommend its careful perusal⁶.

IX. There remains one other part of the duty of sponsors, which (whatever be left unsaid) must not be omitted. It is placed last, not because it must come last in order of time, not because it is the last or the least duty which sponsors have to fulfil, but because it is one which from the very first to the last must accompany every other particular duty which their office lays upon them. This crowning duty of sponsors in behalf of their godchildren is, *to pray for them*. With prayer they were presented as candidates for Baptism ; with prayer their Christian engagements were pub-

⁶ See also Cæsarius in Appendix, No. 1.

licly undertaken ; with prayer for the mystical washing away of sin they were baptized ; in prayer it was sought that their future life might accord with that beginning. So far the whole church in public assembly has united in supplication for them. The sponsors' prayers must accompany them onwards, while they are yet under instruction in the Christian faith, when they are brought to the bishop to be confirmed, and for as long as they continue together their earthly pilgrimage. "Ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you ;" that was the promise upon which, at the font, the gift of grace was first claimed for the infant presented ; "Ask and ye shall have," is a promise which equally encourages continued supplications for his continuance in the state of salvation, and his growth and improvement in spiritual life, by the Spirit's renewing and converting grace.

And this must be remarked respecting the duty now under consideration. It is one, the omission of which can hardly, under any circumstances, be justified. Other of these duties may often be relaxed through separation, or incapacity, or other interruptions, or owing to the care of godly parents may little be called into exercise. But in respect to this duty, absence hinders it not, nor does the worthiness and care of the godchild's parents make it the less necessary. A godfather may, perhaps, be

little qualified, or otherwise unable to edify and instruct the child ; but he cannot be unfitted to intercede for him with God. He may have no words with which to convince and persuade a fellow-creature, but God can read the feeble wishes of his heart, and be moved by his imperfect prayer. Nor will he have ill acquitted himself in his office who only has earnestly fulfilled this single duty.

The subject matter of his prayer in behalf of his godchild may well be drawn from the prayers which St. Paul so frequently makes in behalf of Christians in the various Churches to which he writes. What, for example, can be more appropriate than, as St. Paul does for the Ephesians⁷, to pray that he may “know what is the hope of his calling;” or, as the same Apostle does for the Colossians⁸, that he “might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.” What more appropriate form for him than the Apostle’s constant prayer for the Thessalonians⁹, “that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power; that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” While often, perhaps, he may be able to join the Apostle in thanksgiving also, “I

⁷ See Ephes. i. 15—23.

⁸ See Coloss. i. 9—12.

⁹ 2 Thess. i. 11, 12.

thank my God upon every remembrance of you . . . for your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ¹."

I have now completed the enumeration of the chief duties appertaining to those who present infants at the font for Baptism, in their capacity of godfathers or godmothers². It is a spiritual connexion, and one which, as it has been shown, lasts throughout the whole of their joint life; not only at Baptism, and through childhood, but even during youth and onwards to riper years, as long as they both may live. Its solemn duties indeed are modified from time to time, so as to be adapted to these different stages; but it still exists a sacred tie, and death only can wholly sever the godfather's obligation.

And now think not, kind reader, that you can undertake these duties without being liable

¹ Phil. i. 4—6.

² The chief branches of the godfather's office may be thus synoptically arranged :—A godfather stands

I. *In his own person,*

1. As *witness*, of the fact of the child's Baptism.
2. As *surety*, for his Christian bringing up.

II. *In the person of others,*

1. As *representative of the whole church*, sc. in presenting the infant.
2. As *representative of the child*, sc. in answering in his name.

to give a strict account of the manner in which you fulfil them. Think not that you can, in the name of God, stand as spiritual father and guardian, without becoming solemnly responsible unto Him. It is one of God's children for whom you stand, an heir to His kingdom, and that God will avenge whatever wrong you do to him. Let not your godchild have to reproach you that he never had the benefit of your care; let not the Church have to accuse you that you have neglected her trust; let not God have to condemn you that in His child you have neglected Him.

In this, as in every thing else, seek to have a conscience void of offence before God and before man; and then be assured God accepts your services: He is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which you show towards His name, in that ye have ministered to the little ones among His saints, and do minister.

And here, one word will not be out of place to parents. If so many and so important are the duties which devolve upon those whom you may choose as sponsors for your children, it ought not to be to you a matter of indifference upon whom your choice may fall. Suppose not, indeed, that upon the faith of the sponsors who present them depends the validity of their Baptism. It is not the mere faith of the individual sponsor or parent which entitles them to their

heavenly adoption; nor can any want of faith in them exclude from the Baptismal blessing those who cannot by any actual unbelief exclude themselves. The efficacy of the Sacraments depends not on the worthiness of the minister, much less may it be supposed to depend on the worthiness of the by-stander. At the same time there is much depending upon the choice you make: there are spiritual blessings at stake. Be not, therefore, careful to inquire who might be the most honourable, or the most influential, or the most wealthy among all your acquaintance, that in the hope of some future patronage or favour to the child you might venture to solicit him to be his sponsor*. Let your inquiry rather be, who would most faithfully fulfil the sacred trust, regarding it not only as a kindness to a friend, but as an act of piety towards Christ. No reasonable man would select a reckless and extravagant (not to say a dishonest) man in order to make him trustee of a property. Would you then choose a careless, irreligious man (not to say one openly profane) to watch over your child's training for eternity?

* "Monet Syn. Buscoducensis, 'Fideles in Baptismo filiorum suorum eos potius patrilinos et matrilinos eligant, qui eorum animæ consulere quam qui inopiæ subvenire possint.'" The giving of gifts to the infant by sponsors at Baptism, as any discharge of their proper duty, was at one time obliged to be restrained by canons. (Van Espen, Pars 2, § 1, 2, cap. 5.) Perhaps hence arose the unmeaning custom of the nurse becoming the recipient of their bounty.

Or could you expect that one who never thinks about his own soul, would concern himself about the welfare of the soul of another? Whether of the two were best fitted to remind your child of his Christian profession, the man who neglects God, or he who leads a godly and Christian life; the man who indulges in sin, or he who faithfully partakes at the Table of the Lord? And whether would you desire should pray for your child—the ungodly man whose prayer returns back to him unanswered, or the upright man whose “effectual fervent prayer availeth much.”

For the interest of your child, for your own assistance and encouragement in his training up, for your consolation in case your own days on earth are shortened, for the honour of God, and the benefit of the Church of Christ, be your chosen witnesses in your child’s behalf, upright and faithful servants of our Heavenly Father: be they those who, you may reasonably trust, will consider what their “parts and duties” as sponsors are, and who will endeavour faithfully to fulfil them⁴.

⁴ *On proxies for sponsors.*—Sometimes, when a sponsor is unable to attend at the time of the Baptism taking place, a proxy is appointed to represent him on the occasion. This practice is one which should not be adopted when it can well be avoided; since it is obviously a complicated arrangement for a proxy to be substituted for one who is himself in a great measure but the proxy of another. There is no reason, however, why it should be wholly condemned, and the conve-

nience of it is often very great. In regard to proxies, it should be remembered,—1st, That the appointment of the proxy comes from the absent sponsor, whose duty it is to approve his fitness, and, for his own use, to record his name as being the authority he has to appeal to for the fact of the Baptism; 2ndly, That for the fulfilment of all subsequent duties, not the proxy, but the absent sponsor whom he has represented, is the responsible person.

CHAPTER V.

OBJECTIONS COMMONLY MADE AGAINST THE USE OF SPONSORS CONSIDERED.

I COULD have wished that there had been no occasion for the subject to which we have now to turn. But it is a fact, as most persons are probably aware, that, in the present day, many and deeply-rooted objections against the use of sponsors widely prevail—objections which cause many persons to shrink from ever undertaking the office ; which place in the way of parents many difficulties and hindrances in finding sponsors for their children ; which deter some from bringing their children to be baptized ; and which raise much prejudice in the minds of some against the Church itself, which requires sponsors to be found. Such objections cannot be overlooked ; and I propose to take up some of the more prominent, and give them a calm consideration.

Perhaps the most common of these objections are the five following :—

1. The office (it is said) is unnecessary and

superfluous, and therefore ought to be discontinued.

2. Godfathers and godmothers are made to speak lies; they have to promise what it is impossible for them to ensure.

3. Godfathers and godmothers constantly neglect the duties they undertake.

4. The duties of a godfather and godmother are an encroachment upon the proper duties of the parents, and an interference which they would never permit.

5. The duties of a godfather or godmother are too serious and weighty, and involve too great a responsibility, for any prudent man to undertake them.

1. The first objection, viz., that the office altogether is unnecessary and superfluous, is one on which I have little occasion to dwell, because the answer to it is, I hope, sufficiently given in the contents of the preceding chapters. For the general principle upon which we have said the office is grounded,—that there would be something either profane or superstitious in allowing infants to be baptized, unless, in the prospect of their growing up, some security were given that they should be instructed in the Christian faith; and the very useful character of those several duties which, we have seen, are assigned to sponsors; these may be taken as reasons conclusive against the use of sponsors being

unnecessary or superfluous. Even the universality which, as we have shown, the office has obtained through every age and in every portion of the Church, might lead a thoughtful man to suspect the soundness of his objection, and the wisdom of desiring to have it altogether abolished.

2. I would proceed, therefore, without further delay, to the second objection.

The particular point in reference to which this objection is made is the truthfulness of baptismal stipulations:—godfathers and godmothers, it is popularly said, are here made to speak lies; they have to promise what it is impossible for them to perform. This objection is so commonly made,—it is one which is taken up, not only by profane persons as a ground of jest and ridicule, but by the better-minded, as a matter of conscientious perplexity,—that I am most desirous to give it due attention, and, if possible, to set the subject in some intelligible and satisfactory light.

In replying to this objection against the baptismal stipulations, it will be necessary for me to begin by pointing out certain particulars in which those stipulations appear to be misapprehended. For, as their truthfulness is called in question, it must first be ascertained exactly what it is that they do express, before it can be shown that their meaning may be consistent with truth.

i. The objection speaks of certain promises being given. Now, in these stipulations there is, *strictly speaking*, no promise made at all. A promise is something which refers to a time then future. These stipulations refer to the present. They speak of things which are required as pre-requisites to Baptism — those things, in fact, which are stated in the Catechism in answer to the question, “What is required of persons [about] to be baptized?” They are not promises, therefore, strictly so called, but assertions respecting the present, declaring that the candidate for Baptism is such a person as may properly be admitted thereto.

The form of language in the stipulations, in which the present and not the future tense is in each instance used, will show the truth of the above remarks. “*Dost thou*,” it is first asked, (not “*wilt thou*,”) “renounce?” &c. Then, “*Dost thou*,” (not “*wilt thou*,”) “believe?” &c. Then, again, “*Wilt thou* be baptized?” &c.; that is, “Desirest thou to be baptized?” where the word “*will*” is not the mere sign of the future time, but is obviously the present tense of the verb “*to will*,” signifying to desire, or to purpose. And, lastly, “*Wilt thou* keep God’s holy will and commandments?” &c., where the word “*will*” is used in precisely the same manner as in the preceding question, the sense being equivalent to “Desirest thou to keep God’s holy will?” &c.

The answers exactly correspond to the questions in respect to the time denoted. "I renounce," &c.; "All this I believe," &c.; "That is my desire," are obviously spoken of the present; and, lastly, the reply, "I will," denotes the present time likewise; having, in fact, precisely the same meaning as the previous response, "That is my desire," "I do wish or purpose it¹."

It is a mistake, therefore, to regard these

¹ Perhaps much of the prejudice which prevails against the use of sponsors may be traced to a misunderstanding of this short answer, "I will." The expression in English is unfortunately ambiguous. It is taken by many as absolutely implying the certainty of a future obedient and consistent life; and, so understood, it has naturally been felt to be presumptuous, and given rise to many scruples. In the other sense, however, as explained above, which is the sense here intended, there is nothing which can be regarded as presumptuous. The distinction is more easily shown by translating the words into any other language. Thus, "Wilt thou keep God's commandments?" is not "Garderez-vous les commandemens?" but "Voulez-vous garder?" &c. And the answer, "I will," is not "Je garderai les commandemens," but "Je le veux."

Some conscientious sponsors, in order to escape the supposed difficulty, I have observed to reply in the words as they are given in the Service for the Baptism of Adults: "I shall endeavour to do so, God being my helper." In making this answer they fall into the very evil which they desire to avoid, and give an answer which is very far from being appropriate for a child. Moreover, they have strictly no right to answer in any words but those prescribed (see Canon 29, A.D. 1603). It may be a satisfaction, therefore, for them to learn that the right words need give them no uneasiness.

stipulations, in their strict import, as more than a solemn profession of a present state of mind and will in the person denoted.

ii. The objection, as commonly made, represents the sponsor as the person pledged. Now, the person who is pledged is really not the sponsor, but the child. For it must be the same person as is supposed to answer, and that is most certainly the child, even though the sponsors, in consideration of his inability, utter the answers for him. Thus, observe, it is not as to the sponsors, but as to the child, that the interrogations are addressed. At least, whatever ambiguity there may seem to be in the first interrogation, "Dost thou, in the name of this child², renounce?" &c., there is none whatever in the third, "Wilt thou be baptized?" &c. This can be applicable to none but the child, and leaves no doubt to whom the rest are addressed; because as we interpret one so we must interpret all. Observe, also, in all the interrogatories the singular number is used, as being spoken, not to the several godparents, but to the one person to be baptized. And if it

² The parenthetical words, "*in the name of this child*," which occur in the first interrogation, seem to be inserted as a substitute for actually naming him, since as yet the child has no proper name by which he might be addressed. They do not occur in the first Book of King Edward VI. There is, however, in that Book a rubric here prefixed, in these words: "Then shall the priest demand of the child these questions following, first naming the child."

be said, the sponsors may here be regarded collectively, as representing the infant, and so be addressed in the singular, it may be replied, that in the address immediately preceding, where the sponsors are undoubtedly addressed, the plural number is used, and we have no reason to expect a change of idiom. To such questions as these, the answers which are given must be the answers of the child; and, consequently, it is his profession or pledge which is made, and not the sponsors'.

Such are the facts of the case which it has been deemed necessary first to state in reference to the objection so commonly made, that sponsors promise what they can never perform. Strictly speaking, they promise nothing; and whatever assertion or pledge is given is the assertion or pledge of the child.

But here the objector will of course say, I am ready to admit these corrections; they will, however, make no difference in the point of my objection; for there is still the same untruthfulness remaining, when the sponsors, in the name and behalf of the child, assert of him what he is then wholly incapable of performing.

The supposed untruthfulness must consist either in *the mode* in which the assertions are made, that is, by one party personifying and answering for the other, or else in *the thing which is asserted*.

The charge on the former ground cannot

fairly be made, because there is no kind of deception attempted in that personification of a child by his sponsor. Moreover, the fiction, if such it be called, is not the gross absurdity that the sponsor's *faith* is reckoned as the child's, so that one party has faith, and another is there-upon baptized; it is only that his *voice* is reckoned as the child's. In fact, he is simply the child's proxy in performing certain external acts; and this principle of acting by proxy we are constantly in the habit of allowing as just and valid.

The question, therefore, remains,—Is there any untruthfulness in the *thing asserted*, that is, in its being asserted of or by the infant who is duly presented for Baptism, that he believes or purposes to keep God's commandments, and so on? And this, I am convinced, is the real difficulty upon which the objection is raised.

To this question I do not hesitate to answer, there is no untruthfulness. He has not, indeed, that proper, intelligent, and acting faith, which would be required of a full-grown man, and which in him, too, must gradually unfold itself as he grows in understanding. But he has a principle of faith, instinctive and implicit; and that faith is one which, in his circumstances, may be regarded as a Christian faith. To understand this, consider the naturally dependent, confiding character of any child. Although possessed of a separate personal existence, how

does he rely, simply, undoubtingly, trustfully, on the knowledge and will of those in whose care he is placed: and what is that but faith? A child does not even begin life destitute of faith; it is, from the very first, his instinct, his nature. And he continues to rest in simple confidence in those about him until his reasoning faculties are matured—their will, his will—their faith, his faith—their God, his God. Next apply this to the particular case before us: the child who is brought to Baptism, is one born in the midst of a Christian nation; at least, his immediate relations are those who profess the faith of Christ, or in some way a Christian influence predominates around him; what other conclusion, then, can we draw than that he, too, in his simple confiding trust, has in his degree that which may be regarded as implicitly a Christian faith? And so when his proper parents desire his baptism, and can find friends willing to be sureties for the Christian influence which will be exercised over him, can we say that it is altogether inconsistent with truth when he is said to believe the faith, and to will the service of Christ. It is simply a fact in the order and constitution of our human existence, which is thus appealed to, which cannot be denied by any just observer of human nature. The child, under the circumstances described, does implicitly acquiesce in the whole Christian profession; he has, in a manner, Repentance

and Faith, which are required of those who are to be baptized, though by reason of his tender age he cannot perform them².

Hitherto, in order to meet fairly the charge

² Reference has already been made to a very interesting Epistle of St. Augustine addressed to Bishop Boniface. Part of that letter is occupied by a reply to the inquiry, how the answers of the sponsors in the child's name at Baptism can be reconciled with truth, when no one can tell what his future life may be, and he is at present incapable of actual faith. In this reply he argues for the truthfulness of the answers given by the sponsors, in substance, thus :

1. Because of a certain close similarity existing between the actual truth and the thing asserted. When Good Friday draws near, we may say 'to-morrow,' or 'the next day, is the day of our Lord's passion;' or on the Lord's Day we may say 'to-day our Lord rose,' and nobody would charge us with saying what is not true; because the real day and the anniversary correspond together: and so we may say truly of the infant, that he believes, because of the resemblance thereto in the profession made.

2. Because, by the Sacrament of Baptism is conferred upon the child that grace which is the first germ whence acceptable faith in Christ groweth, and which in his case avails for the present as if it were actual faith.—[See Hooker, E. P. v. 64.]

These explanations seem rather to view the child as one already baptized, instead of a candidate for Baptism. They justify the use of the word "faithful," as applied generally to all Christian people, young as well as old; but they do not seem so strictly applicable to the difficulty, whether a child may with truth be said by his sponsors to believe, before baptism.

On this subject see also a passage from a writer under the assumed name of Dionysius the Areopagite (in Appendix I.), whose explanation seems satisfactory.

of untruthfulness, we have taken the stipulations in their closest and most literal sense, as pledges given for the time then present. It will be said, however, — Is this all which the stipulations mean? Is there no promise or bond for the future, at least implied by them also? I answer, Yes, there is; for since the blessing sought in Baptism is a continuous one, so the pledges then given for the time present must also be regarded as promises setting forth the corresponding obligation which must continue for the time to come.

These promises, *implied* in the words of the Baptismal stipulations, are (as it has been before said) promises contracted not on the part of the sponsors, but on the part of the child baptized. Thus observe the language used in the Baptismal Service, "This infant must faithfully for his part promise;" and again, "Forasmuch as this infant hath promised by you, his sureties:" and in the Catechism, "Why are infants baptized? Because they promise." It is true, that the promise made seems sometimes to be ascribed to the sponsors, and not to the child, as in another place of the Catechism, — "My godfathers and godmothers did promise and vow three things in my name." But this may be understood in no other sense than that given above. It signifies not that they *make* the promise, but only that they *pronounce* the promise which the child makes. And this is

plain, because when they are spoken of as promising, it is always with this qualification, "in the name of the child," which implies, that they are but his proxies, and that the child is the principal in the transaction.

Here then the objection of untruthfulness will again be urged. It will be said, An infant cannot make promises; it must therefore be a pure fiction, when he is represented as so doing. Now to this I reply,

1. An infant may enter into contracts. This we know is fully recognized in human laws, and is not of unfrequent occurrence in secular affairs when the interests of minors require it.

2. An infant may enter into covenant or contract with God. There is no occasion to prove this point, because my readers, in acknowledging the lawfulness of Infant Baptism, already allow it.

3. In every contract there are made mutual pledges, or terms, expressed or understood; the very nature of a contract implies as much.

4. In the Christian covenant, therefore, such mutual pledges must exist: on the part of the person baptized, in particular, the covenant, by its own nature, requires the bond of repentance, faith, and obedience; and when an infant is baptized he is no less pledged thereto than any other person.

5. Surely then, if there be this bond or promise really contracted in Baptism by every

infant baptized, there is no lie spoken, but a plain and intelligible truth, when, in some form, it is openly set forth and declared. Now it is precisely to this effect that the stipulations (when regarded as promises), are to be understood; their particular form merely serving to mark out clearly whom the promise principally concerns. When for the child the sponsor answers, "I renounce them all," let him understand that answer to mean, Yes, in truth, this child who so speaks by me, as every one who is baptized, is henceforth for ever bound to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil:—be solemn declaration made hereof. When he answers, "All this I stedfastly believe," let him understand it to mean, Yes, in truth, this child, as every one who is baptized, is bound to believe what God has sufficiently revealed to us of salvation through Christ:—be solemn declaration made hereof. When to the question, "Wilt thou be baptized in this faith?" he answers, That is my desire; he must understand, Yes, it is for this child's good, and he may ever have cause to look back to it with thankfulness, that he be enrolled among the faithful in Christ Jesus:—be solemn declaration made hereof. And when to the question, "Wilt thou obediently keep God's will and commandments?" the sponsor answers for the child, "I will," he is to understand, Yes, verily the child, both now and henceforth is bound by every holy obligation so

to resolve and diligently to act:—be solemn declaration made of this also.

Let the sponsor thus make his answers, having simply before his mind the deep reality of the obligations under which that particular child comes, when he is received into the Christian covenant, and he will not feel those answers to be deficient in importance or in truth.

3. The next objection against the use of sponsors which I have to notice, is the ever ready argument that *the office is abused*, for that godfathers and godmothers neglect the duties which are laid upon them.

We must with grief acknowledge that the neglect complained of is sadly true. Some neighbour is asked by a parent to stand as sponsor to his child; he does so because he is asked, thoughtlessly, and as matter of course, or as a mere compliment to a friend, and then forgets the child altogether, and the relation he bears to it. And this is no uncommon case; so that we may constantly hear such reproaches as these, "My sponsors never cared about my soul," or "My godfather never spoke a word to me in all my life." But when this neglect is made an argument against the office, then surely it must be pleaded, that in spite of all neglect and forgetfulness on the part of the sponsors, yet still (as we have had occasion to show in a former chapter) it is not wholly useless; espe-

cially as giving to Baptism a due publicity, and affording afterwards an evidence of the fact. Moreover, it *need* not be so abused; the neglect complained of is not inseparable from it. For the fault is not in the office, but in those who undertake it; arising, in a great degree, from the careless way in which parents make choice, as sponsors, of unfit and improper persons. How easily, therefore, might it, in each case, be remedied, if parents, carefully considering the meaning of the sponsor's office, set themselves as far as possible to find those to undertake it for their own children, who were faithful and conscientious. No longer could they entertain this objection, when, however the office were neglected in the case of others, in their own case its advantages were fully realized. And surely the too prevailing neglect should move us rather to seek to restore the institution to its true and proper usefulness, than to reject it as if it were worthless.

4. A fourth objection which is sometimes urged against the use of sponsors is this—that the exercise of the office of godfathers and godmothers is an *usurpation of the proper duties of the natural parents*, or at least an *undue interference* in them which the parents themselves would never approve. Who, it is constantly asked, is a more fitting person than the natural parent to superintend and direct the religious

training of the child? and what parent would permit other persons to dictate to them how this, their proper duty, is to be fulfilled?

Now true it is that such is the parents' unalienable duty; a duty from which, especially as Christian parents, nothing can set them free. The first principles of nature teach us this. Christianity teaches it also: "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to anger, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord⁴." And a heavy judgment must be due to the parents' neglect, as is shown by the instance of Eli,—“I will judge his house,” says God, “for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not⁵.”

But upon this proper duty of the parents the office of sponsor is no encroachment or usurpation. Examine all the “parts and duties” which sponsors undertake, and this will clearly be seen. Their office by no means supersedes or renders less necessary the care and love of the parents themselves; it is no substitute for what they ought to be to them; it demands no surrender or transfer of parental authority; it takes nothing from their hands of their serious responsibility to train up in the fear of God the children whom God has committed to them, nor relieves them of any guilt if they should neglect

⁴ Eph. vi. 4.

⁵ 1 Sam. iii. 13.

them. It is not even (as some might perhaps imagine) a kind of provisional arrangement, by which, in some respects, to supply the parents' place, if it should please God that they should die while their child was yet a minor. For it is an office distinct wholly and widely from that of an earthly parent. It imposes a peculiar duty of its own; and, whether the parents be living, or whether they be removed by death, that duty remains in every respect the same. In the latter case, the sponsors are still but watchers and remembrancers, as they were before; the only difference is, that, as before it was on behalf of the parents, now it is on behalf of the appointed guardians.

Nor can the office be justly complained of as involving even any undue *interference* with the parents or their substitutes in the fulfilment of their duties. It is no undue interference, surely, with the independence and freedom of a man for a friend to warn him of any errors in his general conduct, or to advise him in matters affecting his interests. Especially it can be no undue interference, if that friend be one who, as a fellow-Christian, is pledged by his Christian brotherhood to provoke unto love and to good works. But in the case of godfathers and godmothers there is a further claim which they possess. They have a warranty for what they do, not as friends only, nor as fellow-Christians, but in their very office. For their office is not

self-undertaken, nor assumed without the direct choice or approval of the parents themselves. As it must be only by the consent of the parents or other proper guardians that an infant is brought to be baptized, so it is they who must sanction who are to be its sponsors, and who authorize the laying upon them the duties which the office they accept imposes. It is as though they had said to them, "Be you our witnesses that we fulfil our duty in training up our child in the way he should go. This infant whom God has given us we desire should be made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven ; and the Church has a just claim to be publicly satisfied that if he be admitted to these inestimable privileges he shall be taught to know his high and heavenly calling, and to be trained in the duties of a Christian member. Be you, then, sureties for him. Admonish us if we neglect to have him rightly instructed ; admonish him if he fail to remember, that he is the child of another Family beside his earthly family, and has a Heavenly Father above us all, Whom he has to love and obey." Such is the invitation which parents do virtually make, when they ask any to stand sponsor to their child, and with such authority do they invest him. Who, then, can say that the office is an intrusive one, or take offence at their kind interpositions? Nay, to what parent, truly desirous of his children's

good, would it not afford satisfaction to reflect, that he has chosen friends, pledged to warn and advise him, if ever, while too eagerly labouring in their behalf to provide the meat which perishes, and the learning which may fit them for this life, he forget to direct them to the bread which endureth to life everlasting, and to train them up as sons of God for their inheritance in heaven?

The last of the five objections which have been enumerated I defer to the chapter following.

CHAPTER VI.

OBJECTIONS AGAINST THE USE OF SPONSORS CONSIDERED; AND THE DUTY OF UNDER- TAKING THE OFFICE.

THE last and not the least common of the objections brought against the use of sponsors in Infant Baptism is this: the duties of god-fathers and godmothers (it is said) involve too great a responsibility for any prudent man to undertake them.

Now, perhaps the great majority of those who bring forward this objection do so only upon some mistaken and exaggerated notion which they have formed of what those duties are; as thinking, it may be, that sponsors do absolutely take upon themselves the whole spiritual instruction of their godchild; or on the supposition that, in answering in the name of the child, they really do rashly pledge their word that the infant shall certainly forsake all that is evil, and obediently keep God's commandments; or as fearing that they themselves may incur the penalty of his sins. So far as such persons are concerned, the objection may be regarded as

already answered. For I have already set out at some length the real nature and extent of those duties, and have especially endeavoured to clear the difficulties which are felt by many in connexion with the baptismal stipulations. And if any misapprehensions on these points have been removed, so far I may hope to have satisfied those whose objection rests upon no other foundation.

But in the mind of others this objection may have arisen quite independently of such misapprehensions. These persons are willing to allow that in Christian sponsorship there is no duty undertaken which it is quite impossible to perform—that there is no rash promise hazarded—that there is no assumption of the parents' duties. But still the office in some way appears to them one of such moment that they are afraid to undertake it; they shrink back with morbid conscientiousness, and say, This involves too great a responsibility. We must take the objection, therefore, as made by one who rightly understands the purpose of the institution, and the duties which sponsors undertake, but who would decline the office, or even have it rejected altogether, through some dread of the risk and responsibility which even its proper duties would involve.

The responsibility of the office is indeed great, we cannot, we would not, deny it—great, not because its duties are really difficult to fulfil, or

numerous, or occupying long time, for in many cases they are in fact very easy and few ; but great, because of their peculiar importance, and the solemnity with which they have been undertaken.

It is a solemn thing to stand in the presence of God and in the face of the congregation in suretyship for the Christian training of a helpless babe. It is a solemn thing, in the name of God, to be to it through life in the place of a spiritual watcher and guardian. It is a solemn thing, because the interests of an immortal soul are concerned ; because there must be a strict account given in hereafter of the trust, and because God will heavily avenge the wrong which may be done against one of his sons. All this bespeaks the responsibility of the office to be great, nor could it be right for any to undertake it without entertaining a full sense of its responsibility. But should any shrink from it on this account, I mean, any duly qualified man, who desires to be a Christian in reality as well as in name ? The objector affirms that he should : I would desire, on the contrary, to show that it is a most dangerous yielding to the false fears and scruples of a timid conscience.

For consider is there not a very strong obligation upon us that the office should be undertaken ? and that upon three grounds.

1. There is first the general duty which rests on every Christian to assist his weaker brethren.

The Apostle, writing to the Hebrews, says, "Let us hold fast our profession without wavering, . . . and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works¹." Second only to the holding fast our profession, he places the duty of provoking others to do the same; for what is "love and good works," but a brief compendium of all Christian obedience? Especially in behalf of the young is this duty necessary. It is to no purpose that we are their elders in years, unless we act the part of elders², and watch over them in the days of their helplessness, that they receive not the grace of God in vain. For we "ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves³." Yet how is this to be done, if left only to be fulfilled in the general? How, but by a division of the work, by some undertaking one, another another, and so on throughout the entire body, all sharing in the labour, and each watching on his several ward. In a word, the general duty lead us necessarily to a sponsorial system.

2. Again, beside this ground of the general obligation resting upon all Christians to edify and help one another, there is another ground

¹ Heb. x. 24.

² "*Causam parvulorum* (says St. Augustine) *commendamus majoribus. Loquimini pro tacentibus, orate pro flentibus. Si non frustra estis majores, estote tutores, tuemini eos qui adhuc causam suam agere non possunt.*" Serm. 36.

³ Rom. xv. 1—3.

why the office of sponsor should not be set aside or refused, namely, the special appeal which is made by the parent of the child who is to be baptized, and charity towards the child itself in whose behalf that special appeal is made. What should we think, if—when our Saviour was at hand performing miracles, and some poor blind or crippled man sought earnestly of his friends that they should take pity upon him, and take him to be healed—those friends when asked, should refuse to assist him, and so deprive him of the benefit which the Saviour was ready to bestow? Or what should we think, if the disciples, when our Lord had said, “Suffer them to come,” had refused to assist the children that were coming to Him for a blessing. The case is not very different when the appeal is made by parents to friends or acquaintances, that they should present their child at the sacred font; for that appeal also, is for a work of charity,—a work of charity which thereby becomes marked out for them as their work, and which should be accounted binding upon them, unless special reasons prevent. If, through indifference or love of ease, they refuse, they are (as far as it is in their power to do so) forbidding and turning back the feeble, the lame, and the dumb, who ought to be brought to the great Deliverer.

3. But a third ground there is upon which we may base the obligation to undertake the sponsor's office, which none may lightly esteem,

namely—the law of the Church requiring it. We have seen the general reception of sponsorship from the very beginning, as an established custom of the universal Church; in particular we know the plain requirement respecting it, which our own portion of the Church has seen fit to make, namely—that there shall be god-fathers and godmothers for every child to be baptized. Now this authority of the whole Church of Christ, and of that portion of it of which we are resident members, as not being repugnant to the Word of God, we are bound gladly to obey, not only for the sake of the order and well-being of the body, but also for conscience'-sake as appointed of God. It is no longer, therefore, a matter left to our own choice, whether there be sponsors or not. It is for us each one to be ready to undertake our share in the work, even to the surrender of any private prejudice, as a carrying out of the Church's rule.

On these grounds, it appears, there is no small obligation that the sponsor's office should be duly maintained among us. And if so, what becomes of the objection that its duties involve too great an amount of responsibility for any to venture to undertake them? What right have we to reject a work because it may seem to be very arduous, or for any other reason, when it may be proved to be a duty; and the choice, whether we reject it or accept it, is not given

us? As sponsors, it is true, we shall have at the last Great Day to give account how we have fulfilled our trust; but we shall also have to give account whether we have, on fitting occasions, willingly and cheerfully accepted sponsorship. There is a responsibility upon us in both respects, and we must not neglect and set aside one solemn obligation, because we are scrupulous and fearful lest we insufficiently discharge another.

To make more plain what is here meant, take in illustration any other religious duty. For example, to assemble together for the worship of God; this, doubtless, is a duty, for the right performance of which we shall strictly have to answer: when we bend our knees to pray, we are responsible for praying in spirit; when we profess to hear the preaching of God's Word, we are responsible for really endeavouring to learn. Now because all this is a matter of so great responsibility, would any be justified in saying—"This is a very serious work, and therefore I will not go at all. I will avoid all danger of having to answer for inattention in prayer, or in listening to God's Word, by not putting myself where I shall have to pray or to hear;" so rejecting Public Worship altogether?

All men would at once condemn such an argument as this: for is it not plain, that the assembling for Public Worship is also a duty which it is no less incumbent on him to fulfil?

And yet it closely corresponds to the excuse of those who would reject the task of Christian sponsorship on account of the serious responsibility it involves. It is the self-same kind of attempt to reject a manifest duty, under the show of conscientiousness, only in this case the attempt is more easily detected. And therefore, so far from allowing weight to the objection in hand, we must conclude, that being a plain duty to preserve, and, when fitting occasion offers, to undertake the office of godfather or godmother, no amount of responsibility ordinarily attached to it may be a cause for its rejection.

So much, then, in reply to this last of the objections which we have proposed to consider. I would add a few words more to encourage a willing acceptance of the office where it may properly be undertaken.

Christian reader, it is not as a mere duty that the office is to be regarded, not as a mere task, heavy indeed, but which, notwithstanding, must be gone through. It is no less a privilege than a duty.

For here is set before you a work of Christian *charity*—the “charitable work of bringing infants to Christ’s holy Baptism,” that He might vouchsafe to receive them, to release them of their sins, to sanctify them with the Holy Ghost, to give them the kingdom of heaven and everlasting life. It is an act of love, like unto

His Who sought us when we were lost sheep, and brought us into His fold ; and how can we refuse it, when we are expressly bidden to “love one another as he hath loved us?”

Here, moreover, is afforded you a right, and title, and an incentive also to work for them as for Christ’s little ones—to bear to them His messages of love—to point out to them the pastures which He has provided in His Church below, and to remind them of their inheritance in His Church above. It may be, the happiness also is added of seeing that as they have been trained so they continue to walk⁴.

And here, moreover, is a bond which you may help to cast around, and withal to bind together, the great family of Christ. It may draw you out of yourself, and the engrossing cares of private interests. It may draw you out from your own class or circle, and teach you who is your neighbour. It may make you realize our common brotherhood, and the one great interest in which we are all alike concerned. For it is an office where high and low, rich and poor, may meet as on equal ground. It is not mere worldly position which can make any more or less an eligible sponsor. It is enough that he be an earnest, faithful Christian ; it is enough that he may say, “Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I unto

⁴ “Primo baptisate initiatus es ad pietatem, utinam te e sacro fonte levassem.” S. Bas. ad Posthuvianum, Ep. 128.

thee :” I will give my example, I will give my prayers ; I will take especial interest in this child’s spiritual welfare, as one with whom I am connected by the ties of a spiritual relationship.

In undertaking the sponsor’s office there are, of course, some cases which may seem to have a greater claim upon us than others. It is, perhaps, most frequently the tie of natural kindred and connexion which lays its claim upon us ; it is often the tie of close and intimate friendship ; it is sometimes our acquaintance in the way of business or household employment. It is appropriate and becoming that so it should be ; — that our various family relationships should thus be sanctified to a holy use ; that the boldness and intimacy already existing between friends should be called into exercise, and applied to the discharge of a sacred duty ; and that between master and servant, buyer and seller, neighbour and neighbour, a fresh evidence should be formed of that their common fellowship in which there is neither bond nor free, but “all one in Christ.”

But we may also take a wider range, and be ready even to proffer this assistance upon the general claim of spiritual want and necessity. It sometimes happens, especially among the poorer class, that parents do not indeed refuse that their children should be baptized, but yet

through indifference leave them long unbaptized, because they find a difficulty among their own acquaintances in obtaining the required sponsors. Here is a case where help may be volunteered. Here are little ones at the door who cannot reach the knocker, and shall none put forth his hand to lift the knocker, that these little ones may gain an entrance? These are, as it were, spiritual orphans, and they want a spiritual parent; if you may, supply to them that place and leave them no longer without a godfather's care⁵.

In every case, however, whatever may be the apparent claim, undertake not the office quite at random, or as a mere matter of course. It cannot be doubted that instances may occur when it would be a matter of expediency, sometimes when it would be a matter of duty, to refuse. For example, if the parents of the child, although strangely desiring his Baptism, should yet profess themselves opposed to the faith of Christ, and determined to prohibit Christian instruction; or, if they entertain the wild opinion that he ought to be left uninfluenced

⁵ When the child to be baptized is by its age capable of understanding, some degree of preparatory instruction is required. To see that this is provided is a duty of the sponsors, who, according to ancient practice, were wont, when necessary, to be catechists of the candidate before Baptism, as well as afterwards. See the second passage from Cæsarius in the Appendix.

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in childhood by any religious teaching, to decide by his own judgment in after life upon the religious profession he shall make : in such cases I cannot see how any one could venture to be his sponsor, or, under the present circumstances, to desire his Baptism.

Such instances, however, are rare ; and in the majority of cases the office may be accepted (yea, it becomes the more necessary), even where it may be feared much indifference and evil example may prevail. If you are in doubt about the principles of parents who may be desirous that you should be sponsor for their child, it may be sufficient first to ask them two questions before you venture to consent ; two simple questions, which may make them at once understand the nature of the pledges which you have to make, and will give you a freer course in the fulfilment of them. The one question is,—Do you purpose, and freely consent, that this child shall be instructed in the Christian faith, as the Church requires ? The other,—Do you purpose freely to consent that this child, at the fitting age, being himself willing, shall be brought to the Bishop for Confirmation ? If they offer no denial, you need not doubt that your duty is plain ; you may present him fearlessly.

Other practical difficulties of various kinds may sometimes arise, but for the most part they need not make you hesitate in undertaking this office. It may be, for example, that you

are conscious of a want of ability or boldness on your part to fulfil its duties as you may desire; it may be that you are advanced in years, and your life not likely long to be spared; or it may be that there is a prospect of a wide separation on earth between you and your god-child which may shut you off from intercourse. But *even* in such cases as these, you may not be justified in refusing to stand. Be this your rule, to act as far as opportunity permits, and as far as your powers may enable you, and your conscience may be satisfied. For when God's providence places an insuperable barrier in your way, so the obligation in a measure may be deemed to cease; nor may we fear when we have done our best, but that God will provide for His own.

Take an extreme case (and it is no imaginary one), of a family just about to emigrate. Before they leave their native shores, the parents would desire to have their new-born infant baptized. The friend whom they may ask to be sponsor will, in all probability, never see again either themselves or their child; possibly they may soon lose all knowledge of the other's home and proceedings. But shall he, therefore, decline the undertaking? Certainly not. If he can fairly, by his past acquaintance, rely on the purpose of the parents to educate their children as Christ's members, he is safe in accepting it: he has no just reason to refuse on the mere ground

of the separation about to take place. And is there not gained a sort of compensation for the loss of his personal influence, in the influence obtained by the recollection of that farewell Christian rite performed so far away? Seemed not the sponsor's parting voice to say,—Friend, go with thy young charge and prosper, and bring him up for God. I have never found thee false, and now I have confidence in thee, and have publicly testified my confidence in thee, that thou wilt not let him forget his Christian calling. Go, and though I see thee and him no more on earth, yet “my angel is with you, and I myself caring for your souls⁶.” And if ever the thought of home, and early friends, and the church where your fathers lie, comes back upon your memory, then think also of my suretyship, and acquit me of my promise?

Under all circumstances, however, let the responsibility of the office undertaken make you careful that your godchild be not afterwards forgotten. It were well for godparents to assist their memory by keeping a list of those for whom they have stood. It were well also if godparents, in conjunction with their pastor, were to associate themselves together for the purpose of mutual assistance in matters connected with their office. The best means for the ordinary discharge of their duties—special

⁶ Baruch vi. 7.

difficulties which may occur to any of them—the promotion of Christian education generally, and the seeking out such as, through want of godparents or otherwise, remain unbaptized:—these points call for the serious attention of earnest members of the Church, and require their combined as well as their individual exertions. Indeed, whatever real improvement is to be looked for in the vigour and working energy of the Church, must in its measure be effected by a more faithful attention to this important office. Present unreality, and carelessness about sponsorial engagements, cannot continue, without our sinking deeper and deeper in coldness and death. There must be a waking here, that the life of the Church in all its parts may be seen and felt. There must be both a greater earnestness in fulfilling sponsors' duties, and an increased conviction of our obligation to become sponsors.

In conclusion, I must once more remind my reader,—shrink not from the solemn task. The Apostle exhorts you; the Church invites you; charity requires it of you; parents call aloud for your assistance; infants by their very helplessness demand it. And when you have done it to any of the least among His brethren, you have, above all, this crowning encouragement—Christ regards it as done unto Himself.

APPENDIX I.

THE following are some of the passages referred to at page 11.

Cæsarius, Bishop of Arles, in a Sermon preached on Easter Day, thus addresses sponsors :

“Of this, dearly beloved brethren, I admonish you ; whoever of you, men or women, have spiritually received children from the sacred font, to remember that you have stood as sureties for them to God. Ever, therefore, have for them the anxiety of true love. Admonish them to be chaste ; to preserve their virgin state until their marriage ; to refrain from evil speaking and perjury ; not to utter filthy and wanton songs ; not to be proud or envious ; not to retain anger or hatred in their heart ; not to watch for omens ; not to hang about their necks phylacteries or diabolical symbols : to avoid enchanters as the ministers of the devil ; to keep the Catholic faith ; to frequent church ; not to care for eloquence, but to listen attentively to the reading of Holy Scripture ; to entertain strangers (and as it was said to them in the administration of Baptism, to wash the feet of guests) ; to be at peace among themselves ; to strive to reconcile those that are at variance ; and to show to priests and parents the honour and affection of true love. If these and such like things

ye endeavour to impress on the minds of your sons and daughters, with them ye shall joyfully attain to everlasting blessedness."—Inter S. Aug. Serm. ; Serm. 168, in Appendice, Par. 1838, alias de Temp. 163, § 3.

Again in another Sermon :—

"We, who have for a long time been new born in Christ, ought in all things to show to those who are about to be baptized an example of holy living But especially should those of you who desire with religious love to receive sons and daughters, both before they are baptized, and after that they have been baptized, unceasingly teach and admonish them about the duties of chastity and humility, sobriety and peacefulness; and remember that you are their sureties, for in their behalf you answer that they renounce the devil, his pomps and works. May then, both they who receive and they who are received, that is, both fathers and sons, strive to keep that covenant, which, in the Sacrament of Baptism, they contract with Christ, nor ever desire any of the devil's pomps, or this world's wanton pleasures. So that, by God's help, both may together attain unto eternal rewards, through the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ."—Serm. 266, in App. Par. 1838, alias de Temp. 216, § 5.

The Author of the "*Questiones ad Orthodoxos*," ascribed to Justin Martyr, writes as follows. His words must not be understood as denying the salvation of infants dying unbaptized.

"Since those who die in infancy have neither praise nor blame from any thing they have done, what will be the difference at the resurrection between those who have been baptized and done nothing themselves, and those who have not been baptized, and have likewise done nothing?—Answer: This is the difference between those infants deceased who have been baptized, and those who have not been baptized; that the baptized will partake of the baptismal blessings, and the unbaptized will not.

Infants obtain the baptismal blessings by the faith of those who bring them to Baptism."—Quæst. 56.

Another ancient writer [about A.D. 400] speaking on the necessity of *early* education founded on the fear of God, appeals in confirmation to the well-known custom of Infant Baptism (*hujus testis est experientia*). He says:—

"A child is brought to be baptized when he is still a suckling; and from that infant of so tender an age as he is, the priest forthwith demands covenants, contracts, and agreements. As a minor, he accepts his godfather as sponsor for him, and he asks, Does he renounce the devil? He does not say, Does he renounce the devil in respect to the end of his life?—nor does he join himself in covenant with Christ in respect to the end of his life? But he demands renunciations, and fellowship in Christ, which are at once, in the very beginning of life, to be binding upon him."—Hom. in Ps. xiv. (i.e. xv.) in Latin editions of St. Chrysostom.

The writer under the assumed name of Dionysius the Areopagite [about A.D. 400] thus answers the objections of heathens against the use of sponsors.

"That infants who are not yet able to understand divine things, should be made partakers of the divine birth, and the pledges of heavenly fellowship, seems to profane men to be something truly ridiculous, if [as they suppose to be the case] holy things and sacred creeds are taught to those who cannot understand and receive them. And still more ridiculous does it seem to them, that [as they suppose it to be] others should make renunciations and holy professions in the infant's stead . . ."

"On this subject we say what our spiritual teachers, instructing us according to ancient traditions, have delivered down to us . . . They have thought fit that infants should be received in this manner: the natural

parents of the child brought, shall deliver him to some Christian man, as to a good instructor in divine things, under whom, as his godfather and spiritual sponsor, he shall afterwards learn. The godfather promises to bring up the child in the life of holiness, and then of him the priest demands the making of the renunciations and holy professions. This however is not, as they would scoffingly say, initiating one person in the stead of another; for he does not say, Instead of this child, I do myself renounce and profess, but he says, This child renounces and professes: that is [as it is implied], I promise to persuade this child, when he comes of age, to understand by my godly instructions, to renounce wholly our spiritual adversaries, and to profess and fulfil the holy promises.

“There is nothing, therefore, as I think, absurd, for the child to be admitted into the divine life, when he has a guide and spiritual sponsor to instruct him in divine things, and to guard him, while inexperienced, from his adversaries . . .”—Eccles. Hier. cap. 7, § 11.

APPENDIX II

THE theory maintained in the Romish Church respecting spiritual affinities or relationships contracted in Baptism, is that they are impediments to matrimony, as necessarily as certain natural affinities are; that in consequence a subsequent marriage is altogether null and void, and a previous marriage, though not null, is rendered illicit. It is almost unnecessary to say that this theory is not founded on nature, and is entirely unsupported by any authority, direct or indirect, of Holy Scripture.

The origin of the theory may be traced to the civil regulations of the Roman Empire. It appears that, by the laws of Severus, Philip, and Valerian, it was forbidden that a man should marry a woman to whom he was guardian, or marry her to his son. The law was obviously for the protection of the ward, and that the guardian might not be tempted to exercise an undue influence in order to secure her property to his own family. Constantine limited this law, prohibiting such marriages only while the ward was a minor.—V. Bingham, b. xxii. ch. 2, § 10.

The law of Justinian [A.D. 528] extended the restriction forbidding a man from marrying his goddaughter, whether she were his foster-child or not, as being a connexion productive of paternal affection. (Cod. Just. lib. v. 4; Bingham, b. xi. ch. 8, § 12.) It might seem, however, that the real reason was because the sponsor

might not unfrequently become her guardian in temporal matters, inasmuch as the law applies only to the case of a godfather and goddaughter.

Passing by the gross forgeries of the papal decretal letters [e. g. that of Deodatus in Labbe], we find the theory for the first time recognized in ecclesiastical law by a council held at Constantinople A. D. 692 (Canon 55); and here the further prohibition is made that a man may not marry the mother of his godchild, thus excluding a parent from the sponsorship to his own child.

By various canons of the following ages, and by the rigid interpretations of canonists, these prohibitions were increased to a most extravagant and perplexing degree; and hence arose a long train of evils in the way of appeals, extortionate dispensations, arbitrary separations, and unjust defamations, under which, among other grievances, our Church laboured before the Reformation.

The Council of Trent, unable to shut its eyes to the enormous amount of abuse and scandal which the multitude of these prohibitions created, sought to lessen the evil in two ways: they reduced the number of sponsors to one, or, at the most, to two, a male and a female (so that by no more sponsors than these could any affinity be contracted); and they limited all the spiritual affinities contracted at Baptism to the following:—

1. Between a sponsor, and
 - i. the person baptized;
 - ii. the parents of the person baptized.
2. Between the baptizer, and
 - i. the person baptized;
 - ii. the parents of the person baptized.

Hence, it appears, the following would be prohibited marriages in the table of the Romish Church, at the present day:

A man may not marry—

His godchild.

The mother of his godchild.

His godmother.

The godmother of his child.

The child he baptizes.

The mother of the child he baptizes.

The woman by whom he may have been (privately) baptized.

The woman by whom his child may have been (privately) baptized.

And in like manner for the woman.

The whole exhibits the growth of an arbitrary, useless, and burdensome system of restrictions, based upon an imaginary analogy between spiritual and natural affinities.

The following extracts will further illustrate the question, why it is appointed that the office of sponsor should no longer be undertaken by the parent:—

“Causam, cur id factum fuerit, apud Patres non reperio. Si conjecturis utendum, existimo fuisse, vel ut admonerentur fideles eam spirituales educationem a carnali longe distare; vel ut mysteriorum fidei Christianæ peritioribus illa provincia demandaretur, cum parentes in maximâ rerum divinarum ignoratione versari sæpe contingat.”—Josephus Vicecomes de antiquis Baptismi ritibus, lib. i. 33, ap. Van Espen.

“Verisimilius crediderim parentibus officium patrini in Baptismo proprii filii fuisse interdictum, postquam cognatio spiritualis atque ex ea resultans impedimentum matrimonii inter patrinum et baptizati matrem inductum fuit, cujus cognationis et impedimenti apud pristinos auctores mentio nulla occurrit.”—Van Espen, pars ii. § 1, cap. 5.

APPENDIX III.

THE following are some of the names by which god-fathers and godmothers are denoted in Greek and Latin :—

<i>ἀνάδοχος.</i>	Offerens.
<i>θεῖος πατήρ.</i>	Patrinus et matrina.
<i>πατήρ.</i>	Compater et commater.
<i>σύντεκνος.</i>	Pater et mater.
<i>προσφέρων.</i>	Patrimus et matrima.
Sponsor.	Susceptor.
Fidejussor.	Levans.
Fidedictor.	

The words ‘*filiolus*’ and ‘*filiola*’ are sometimes used to denote godchildren.

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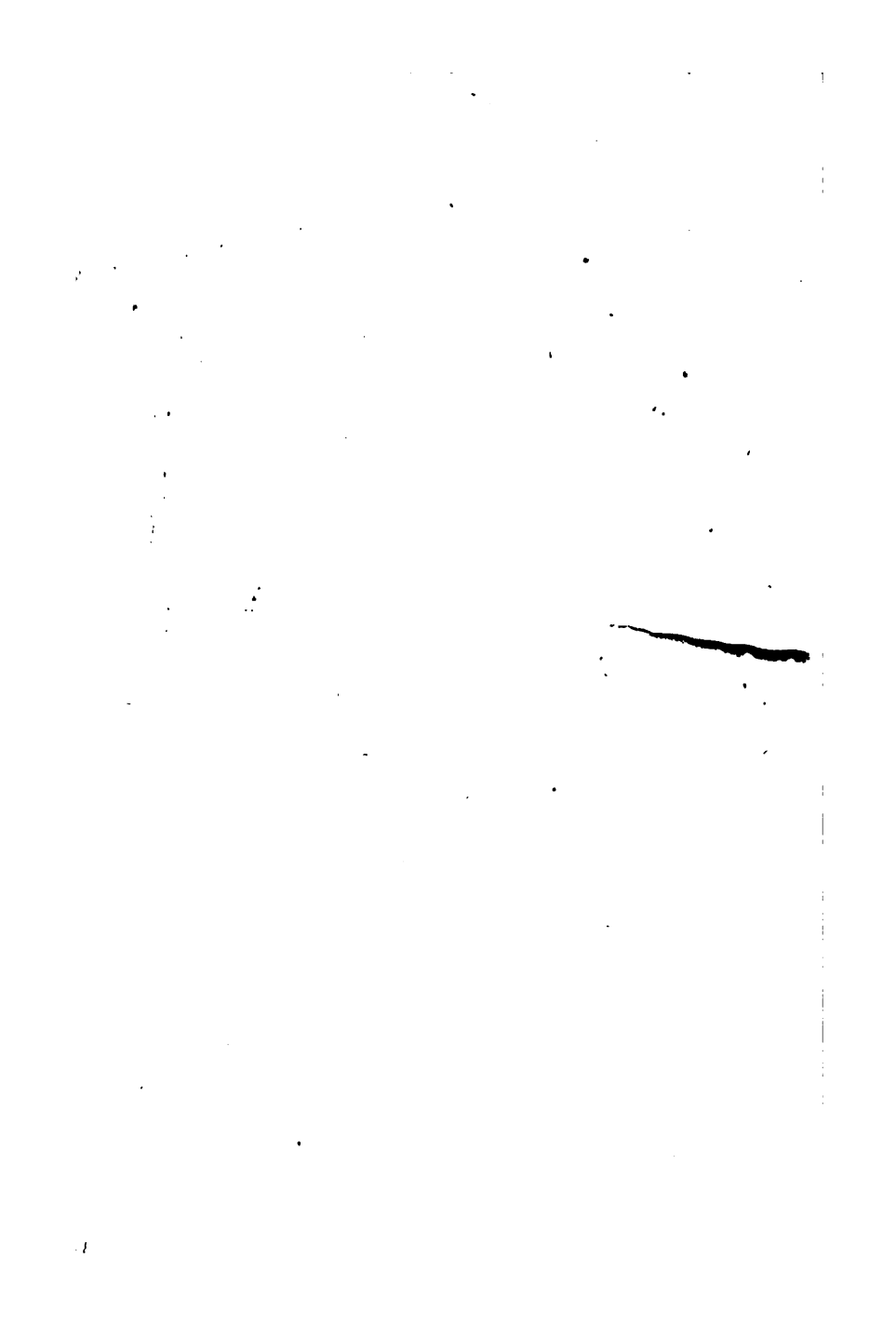
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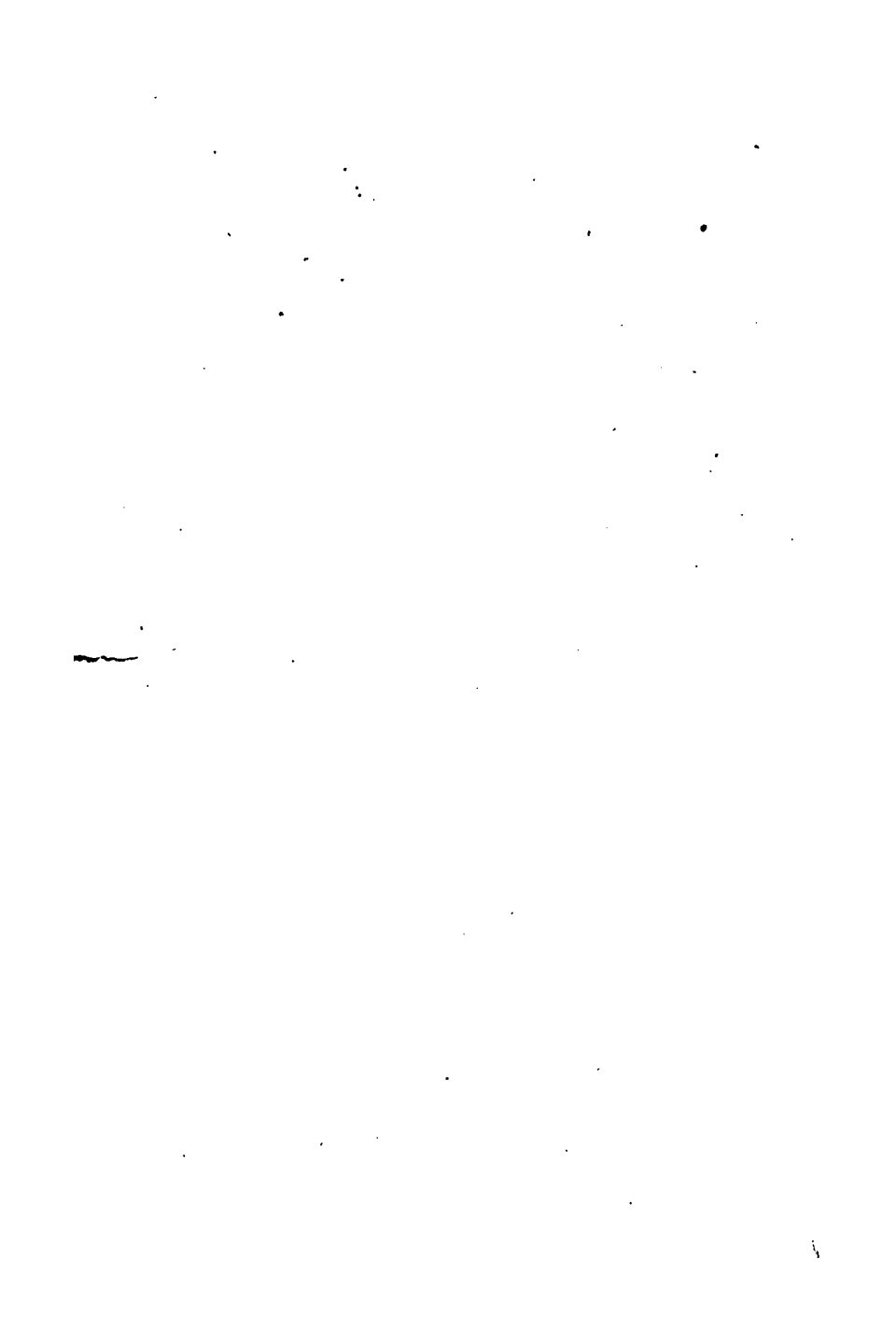
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